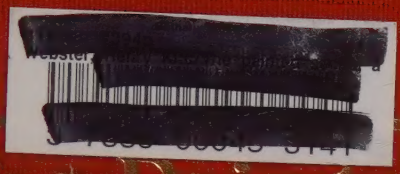

The Painted Scene

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THE PAINTED SCENE

"Look here, Feathers. You forget it. I'm all right, see."

THE PAINTED SCENE

And Other Stories of the Theater

By

HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

Author of The Real Adventure, Etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN AND
HERMAN PFEIFER

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TO THE READER

THE PAINTED SCENE is not a novel in substance any more than in form. The stories collected here appeared, severally, in *The Saturday Evening Post, McClure's* and *Collier's,* whose courtesy in permitting their republication is hereby acknowledged. Some of the stories are closely related, some loosely; some are not related to the others at all, except as all possess a common background—the world of the theater.

They were written during a period of two years, and not at all in the same attitude toward their subjects, nor, for that matter, from the same degree of knowledge. If, in addition to proving a source of innocent entertainment, they raise a little the common denominator of human experience between the stage folk who look so remote to us, and ourselves, who look equally remote to them, they will have done all they were meant to do.

I am glad of this chance to make my grateful acknowledgments to the many tolerant, friendly people who have contributed to my education in this subject, putting up with me when I must have been in the way, taking me for granted when they must have wondered what I was driving at, letting me forget, for the time,

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that I was an outsider among them. I hope they may feel, if they read them, that these stories are worth the pains they took with me, just as I hope, my dear reader, that this volume may, when you have finished it, seem to have been worth your time.

But I am, be it noted, the one party to the transaction who takes no risk; because the pleasure I got out of the experiences which made possible the writing of these stories was really immense.

H. K. W.

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THE PAINTED SCENE

THE PAINTED SCENE

THE beginnings were conventional enough; not very edifying—not in the least worth telling the story of, if they had gone on and led to what such beginnings generally do lead to. But because, at a certain point, there came a difference, I am going to ask you to bear with me patiently while I get the rather shabby and shopworn preliminaries out of the way and get down, as briskly as I know how, to the point where the difference began.

She was a chorus girl in a show which we shall call, to avoid being unpleasantly personal, *La Revue Folle,* a vividly orchidaceous dramatic entertainment which flourished annually on Broadway. She was the one—if you care about particulars—who came out in the first act with apparently nothing on but a hat, a feather boa and a large muff. A second glance corrected this impression, to be sure.

As for him, he was a young man—thirty perhaps, and he sat in the front row. At the end of the first act he found out, from an adequately tipped usher,

that her name was Daisy Reddesdale, bought a bunch of orchids at the hotel florist's around the corner and sent them back to her with a note to the effect that he was lonesome, that he was sitting on the aisle in the front row and that wouldn't she please glance down that way and see if she liked his looks? She slanted a half-defiant, and perhaps a little contemptuous, nod at him during the second act—enough so that he came around to the stage door. And he lifted his hat and said, "Good evening," when she came out. And she said, to make it seem a little less raw, somehow, "I *thought* I saw you out in front." And a taxi driver, with an eye on the cop at the Broadway corner, came swooping up on the wrong side of the street, knowing a sure-fire fare when he saw one. Then the young man about thirty put Daisy Reddesdale into the taxi and took her to one of the regular restaurants and ordered the regular supper, including a quart of the regular champagne.

The conversation halted and creaked more or less while they were waiting for the champagne to come and really start things. She said New York was a great little old burg, wasn't it? And he said it certainly was. And she asked him if he lived here, and he said no, she was the only person in town that he knew. Then she asked him if he had got that coat of tan (there is something very classy about tan in

winter) down at Palm Beach? And he said no, he was just up from the Zone.

Right there is where things began to get different. Because she didn't say, as nine out of ten chorus girls, with a bitten-down yawn, would have, "Oh, yes, of course," and change the subject. Nor, as the tenth chorus girl would have, "What's the Zone?" She said something that made him set down his just filled glass and stare at her.

The first of the series of happenings that made the difference was the discovery by the producer of *La Revue Folle*—a discovery not made until rehearsals were in full swing—that he was shy a climax for his first act. The next thing was the submission to him, by an extraneous song writer, of a really cracking tune called *Panama*. The producer heard the tune and decided that Panama was good dope. So he ordered a new set of costumes and sent for the head of the scenic studio that had built the production, telling him what he wanted in a few well-chosen words, and urging him to cut loose and hustle.

With the intermediate processes we have nothing to do; the next fact that matters to us being that Daisy Reddesdale, who had not been nicknamed Moony for nothing, was wandering at large on the stage when they ran down the new back cloth which represented, more or less, the entire Isthmus of Panama, with a

fleet of battle-ships going through the Canal. The scenic artist had followed instructions and cut loose, and no important feature of the big job was omitted. By a miracle of perspective you were able to see the Gatun Dam, Gatun Lake, Culebra Cut, and as I said, a fleet of white battle-ships with practicable search-lights steaming through at eighteen knots or so an hour. The upper part of the stage was built up on parallels, and by this means one of the locks was presented on the stage itself; the vessel steaming in at the low level, showing only her masts and funnels, was locked through and out again at high level—all in less than thirty seconds. A record which may well overwhelm Colonel Goethals with despair.

As I have said, Daisy was mooning around at large, when this was tried out for the first time. It caught her eye. It, as it were, hypnotized her, and she stood at gaze until somebody in authority wanted to know what in blazes she was doing there and ordered her out of the way.

She was always doing things like that. In nicknaming her—half in affection and half in contempt, which is the regular formula for producing nicknames—"Moony," her associates had characterized her pretty well. "Nosey" wouldn't have done at all, although she was always asking questions. Because they weren't inquisitive questions. The swift-running

current of dressing-room scandal was never troubled by her oar. Such piquant matters of fact or surmise as that Violet Lockhart had got a new one, or that Jefferson's wife had hired detectives, never even made her prick up her ears.

Daisy's questions generally began with "Why," like those with which a small boy poses his father, and they were universally received with shrieks of derision.

This never troubled Daisy, who, as a rule, stood by her guns until somebody had been found who, between amusement and exasperation, would give her an answer that satisfied her. It had occurred to her once to wonder, for instance, why a spotlight "stayed little"—why the pencil of light shot from the rim of the topmost gallery consented not to spread out. Somebody told her this was because it had to go through a hole; whereupon Daisy punched a hole in a shoebox and demonstrated, with a single incandescent light, that it didn't work that way. She kept the question alive for two weeks, until it was finally laid to rest by the chief electrician, who drew her a diagram of a hyperbolic paraboloid reflector, and expounded the matter to her.

When anything big happened in the world, like the sinking of the *Titanic,* for instance, Daisy was unbearable for a month.

This capacity of hers for wonder, an excellent—

almost an essential—thing in a poet, is not precisely one of the qualities demanded of a chorus girl; and the absence of mind and the trick of losing herself to all mundane considerations, which went with it, would have lost her her job a hundred times had it not been for the fact that she had an infallible sense of rhythm, that she could sing in tune, and that she had a shape which was simply a producer's dream. The more it was revealed, the more beautiful it got. These assets made her one of the Old Guard—that small battalion of chorus girls who, though shows may come and shows may go, are never out of a job and never leave New York; whose world is bounded by One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street on the north and Herald Square on the south.

But, though she was never out of a job, she gave up more of her weekly salary in fines, I suspect, than any other member of the battalion. Her absent-mindedness was one of the reasons for this. The other was—can I find a polite way of putting it?—that she was not brought to the theater in a motor-car.

The chorus at *La Revue Folle* contained perhaps a larger percentage—this was really a point of pride with the management, although it was not included in the regular advertising—a larger percentage of young ladies who boasted limousines and real jewelry and expensive apartments and the appanages that went

with this equipment, than any other chorus in the country.

There was, of course, a certain fatuity in fining a girl a dollar, when she had a thousand dollars' worth of diamonds on her fingers at the moment. And beside that, she might get sore and make things really unpleasant if you did. You had to keep up the appearance of discipline, somehow, so it was natural to make a girl like Daisy the goat.

Why she had neglected to supply herself with the perquisites of her position is perhaps a little hard to explain. She wasn't conscious of any great moral superiority to her more luxurious sisters. All she had to offer was the statement that she couldn't be bothered. The fact remained, anyhow, that she went on living pretty exclusively on her thirty a week, and that it was by her own election that she did so.

Well, there you have all you need to know about Daisy to account for her rapturous absorption in the contemplation of the new back cloth which they unrolled at rehearsal for the first time that day, and of the practicable lock which the carpenters were building up-stage; also, for the extreme discourtesy of the stage manager's request to know what she was doing out there in everybody's way, and his order that she move on.

She didn't get sore and say anything fresh; with-

drew meekly enough, but simply to another point of vantage, where she could go on gazing at this new wonder. She was fined and otherwise remonstrated with on numerous occasions during the next two or three days—and all of that before she ever asked a question. But when she began—when the flood broke loose—you simply had to stand from under.

The other chorus girls drowned her out in shrieks as soon as they heard the word "why," and her friend, the chief electrician, who began incautiously by admitting that he knew all about it, soon was fleeing her as if she had the bubonic plague. Then somebody, trying to be funny, picked up a steamship folder somewhere that advertised a special cruise to Panama, devoting a page or two to the wonders of the Canal, and presented this, derisively, to Daisy.

She ignored the derision and took it in good faith, and other literature of the same sort followed. The effect of all this had not been foreseen. It simply provided her with new and more unanswerable questions. When she was heard asking what a suction dredge was, and how a steam shovel worked, people realized that the joke went a good deal deeper than they had thought.

One of the simplest forms of humor in the world (there is only one simpler, and that consists in laughing at people who are getting hurt, tortured, hanged,

and so on) expresses itself in laughing at people who, bodily or mentally, are different—the dwarf, the wittol, the lunatic. If you want a sample, consider the court fools who used to amuse the barbarous kings and barons of the Middle Ages. Well, my notion of Daisy's associates in the chorus of the *Revue Folle* is that if you could set them back a thousand years into the court of one of those barbarous barons, most of them, after a momentary gasp of astonishment, would find themselves quite at home.

Anyhow, with a nudge here and a grimace there, the suggestion was passed around that Daisy was—well, of course, not a lunatic, nor even what is meant by a nut, but—an alien—that's the word I want.

Anybody who has lived or spent much of his time in a small compact society—a college fraternity or a business office will do for examples—will remember that while nobody was immune to jokes, there developed, in course of time, the tradition of making some one person the special target for them—the butt. You all felt that that one person was more different from all the rest of you than any of the rest of you were from one another. Tacitly there was a ring drawn around him, which he inhabited all by himself.

Probably you never gave any very serious thought to the matter unless you happened to be the person within the ring. In that case, if you were a reflective

soul, you indulged in the consolations of philosophy and told yourself that you had been paid a compliment. If you were not, you just felt lonesome and unhappy and wondered why.

However, living with a ring drawn around you is a wonderful cultivator of reflections.

What Daisy Reddesdale did was not to stop asking questions, but to begin asking them of herself instead of other people. And mostly they began, as before, with "why." Don't think she made a tragedy of it. She was no sensitive plant shriveling at an unfriendly touch. And the fact that her vocabulary of introspective terms was very strictly limited saved her from going very far. The upshot of her reflections came to about this: that she and her companions in the chorus, and the principals, and the audiences out in front, were a bunch of shines. Not very real and not very important. There were real people in the world—people who did things that mattered. But her world didn't touch theirs at all.

Certainly the front of the house was no better than the back. They wanted—out there—precisely the sort of thing that she and her colleagues on the stage were giving them. One was a perfect complement to the other. Those people in the first four or five rows, whose faces she could distinguish—people who had paid five dollars a pair for their seats in order to be

close enough to be sure of seeing everything there was to see—were acting really, just as much as anybody in the show. Each of them was almost painfully anxious to convince his neighbors that he was wise, all right—nothing was getting by him. But she and her companions had nothing to feel superior about. They were trying their best, all of them, to give those imitation rounders what they wanted.

Occasionally, of course, her eye picked an exception—somebody out in those five front rows who looked as if he didn't belong. And the most striking of these exceptions was the deeply tanned young man about thirty, who sat one night, on the aisle. She saw him in a minute and it wasn't very long before she was aware that he had seen her. What the devil had he come here for she wondered.

Well, at the end of the first act she got his note, and then she knew. And she gave a harsh little laugh and shrugged her bare shoulders and asked herself, "After all, why not?" What was the use of being lonesome and asking questions and letting them draw a ring around you?

Have I accounted for that half-defiant, half-contemptuous nod she slanted down at him when she first came on the stage in the second act? I don't know. She never explained it to me. I have just pieced it together from scraps too fragmentary to be

called confidences. But I imagine it was something pretty much like that. Anyhow, I know that she did nod to him, and that from that point things went on just as I have told you.

When he told her that he was just up from the Zone, what she blurted out—with a sudden stare of incredulity and a setting down of her own glass—was:

"My Gawd! What are you doing here?"

But she didn't give him the time he needed, in his astonishment, to answer the question. She flushed, bit her under lip, and catching up her glass again, nodded at him across the rim.

"Here's luck!" she said.

There was a bit of a silence. He hadn't found his conversational feet yet.

"Been working down there on the Canal?" she asked. The question came out with something of a rush—as if she had not meant to ask it and then had done it anyway.

He released a rather explosive sigh. "Four years," he said. "And I struck New York this afternoon."

"Kind of funny," she said, "that you should come to our show, and see it again, first thing."

"See it?" he echoed rather blankly.

"Sure," she said, "the Canal and the lock with the battle-ship going through."

"Oh, yes—yes. Sure," he said vaguely.

Because, the gospel truth was, he hadn't seen it at all. His seat was over on the right aisle, and he had been looking at Daisy, in her flesh-colored tights and her tunic of American flags that came up only over one shoulder.

She looked very different now, across the table from him, in her little round hat with its high interrogation-point feather and her simple little V-shaped blouse. It took a certain effort of mind to realize that she was the same girl. It wasn't so much her clothes, either, as the way she was looking at him.

"I wish you'd tell me something," said Daisy. "Why—" She hesitated and glanced around. None of the company was within earshot. "Why do they have locks and gates in the Canal? Why don't they have it all open, so a boat can go straight through?"

The question made her seem more a different girl than ever. He didn't answer it at once—stared across at her a little blankly, and once more set down his glass—blankly, and—though the feeling didn't show in his face—almost resentfully.

He didn't want to talk about the Canal. At least, he would have told you, with a good deal of confidence, that he didn't.

He had lived four years in a lattice-work house, with a galvanized iron roof, with six or eight other bachelor engineers, and got his meals in the "Gold"

side of a Commission hotel. He had spent his days in the big resonant repair shop up on the brink of the Culebra Cut. Strenuous, fierce, exhausting days they had been, because when a thing breaks down it's wanted again in a hurry, and as it always breaks in unexpected ways, you can't be sure of having the right material at hand for repairing it. The tension of the big job—the tension that never slacked—drew up unexpected expedients out of your mind, made you a better man than you had any right to be, got more—oh, ever so much more—than your regular horse-power out of you.

It wasn't a thing you romanticized about. You had no spare energy for that, and besides, it was against the traditions of the place. Nobody wore an oriflamme or carried a motto on his shield. You cursed the incompetents, wriggled your shoulder into as comfortable a position under the load as you could find, grunted and pushed. That was the day's work.

When it was over, you sat around in the veranda, with your six or eight messmates, and talked about the Job. Or else you went over to the Y. M. C. A. and played pool on the crooked table—and talked about the Job. And then you went to bed—and dreamed about the Job. On Sunday, perhaps, a married friend asked you to dinner down the line somewhere, or there'd be a ball game, or a concert by the Commis-

"I wish you'd tell me something," said Daisy

sion band. But you found it a little irritating to have nothing to do, and when you talked about the Job your comments had more acid and pepper in them than on week-days. Because, of course, whether at your friend's table, or at the ball game, or in the veranda at the Tivoli listening to the band, the Job was still what you talked about.

So you can imagine that it wasn't to talk about the Job that this young man about thirty, who sat in an aisle seat at *La Revue Folle,* had flagged Daisy Reddesdale and asked her out to supper.

He had reached New York, as he had told her, that very afternoon, at the end of six days of passionate hurry—he had to hurry, you see, even in a deck-chair—six days of consulting the chart and the log and counting the revolutions of the screw, in an eagerness to get back to what he had, for four years, been calling God's country. Then New York! New York that didn't know him (he lived out in Ohio) nor care a damn about him. New York that, after all his eagerness, terrified him with its strangeness, its newness, its complete absorption in its own affairs. There wasn't a friendly casual word to be had out of anybody. He had tried to get into conversation with a man on the roof of a Fifth Avenue stage, and the man had changed his seat as if he had suspected him of being a pickpocket.

Writing that note and sending those orchids around to Daisy had been rather a last resort. He had never done anything just like that before, and when it was done he was seized with a feeling not far from panic. He almost didn't go back to his seat in the front row at all. The slanting nod of assent she gave him was the first communication he had from anybody. Because you can't count the fixed smile of the hotel clerk, nor the "thank you, sir" of the bell boy to whom you have just given a dime.

A mocking devil in his ear suggested that Daisy's greeting was of the same order, but he managed, at first, not to pay much attention to it. It kept on making itself heard, though, in the taxi, and began again in the restaurant while they were waiting for the champagne. After they'd drunk enough of that, perhaps he'd be able to forget it altogether. Perhaps even she would, too.

Well, the champagne had come and they had had one look at each other across the rims of their glasses, and then—right then, just when things were starting, she had asked him—what a lock was for!

I don't wonder he looked blank. A very little would have made all the difference. If the girl's voice had rung a little flat; if the interest and concern in her face had looked a little—meretricious, why, then he would have laughed and said: "'What are locks for?'

Why, to make little girls ask questions." And he would have reached out to change glasses with her, and would have touched her hands in the process, and things would have gone on in the regular way, to the terminus they were headed for.

But, as he looked at her—blankly, as I said, and at first a little resentfully, for queering the game just as it was getting started—he realized all at once that the eager question in the girl's voice and eyes was not something that he had paid for. Her interest in locks and gates was not a part of the contract which the acceptance of the orchids implied.

Somewhat to his own surprise he smiled at her—a smile of rather a different quality from that with which he had greeted her at the stage door, too.

"Why," he said, "the locks are just a flight of stairs that the ships go up on. Three steps up on one side and three steps down on the other. They go up thirty feet at a step—higher than the ceiling up there. Big ships—liners—battle-ships."

"What do they have to go up the stairs for?" demanded Daisy, and he told her that, and she said, "Gee!" and her eyes fairly shone as she looked across at him. There was no champagne about it, either. After that first sip she hadn't touched her glass.

His own eyes kindled, too, as the potent lure of her eagerness drew him on. A stronger lure, it must

have been, than the insolent loveliness of the girl in the feather boa and the large muff, because it made him forget all about her. About, I mean, the girl he had written the note to.

He told her why they had to build the great dam clean across the lower end of the valley, and how they had wondered whether the soft treacherous land would hold; of the frantic rages of the Chagres River and how they had tamed and harnessed it; of the deadly fever that had conquered the French, and how, under Gorgas, they had learned to smile at it. Finally he told her of the work of biting out the backbone of a hemisphere—the cut through the Continental divide at Culebra; and of the cold slimy malice of the monster Cucarachia, whose first veiled threat had brought despair to the engineers under De Lesseps; how, after lying apparently asleep for weeks, it would come crawling down into the canal overnight and bury a train of cars and a battery of steam shovels. How Gailliard had fought the thing week by week, month by month, year by year, with the only weapon there was—an indomitable patience that never yielded to panic. And how, finally, he had died, as truly in battle as if he had fallen leading a forlorn hope under the colors.

He told her how, when they had had to withdraw the steam shovels to let water in, the monster had

come sprawling down, in his insolence, clear across the cut, and how, with a swarm of dredges, like angry bees, they had attacked it all over again—eaten a channel through what, for its inertness, dynamite could not touch. How they were going on, how they would go on, biting away at it until the last ton of slimy clay that could slide, had slipped to its position of final repose.

It was a queer place to be telling that story, there in the regular restaurant, with its regular habitués all around, applauding the regular music, laughing at the regular sort of jokes. And she was a queer little Desdemona to tell that sort of a tale of conquest to, leaning forward there, with her elbows on the table and the regular champagne going flat in its glass beside her hand.

But Desdemona herself never listened to the Moor's stories with a wider wonder in her eyes, though I'll admit a doubt as to whether Desdemona, when the tale was told, said, "Gee, that's great!" and gave her head a hard little shake in an unsuccessful attempt to recover the present again, as Daisy Reddesdale did.

He was lighting a cigarette with the same end in view, and there was silence for part of a minute. Finally:

"What did you do?" asked Daisy. "Did you run one of those dredges?"

He shook his head. "Repaired them when they broke down," he said, and then he flushed a little as it occurred to him, somewhat unaccountably, that he hadn't yet told her his name. It hadn't been signed to the note that went with the orchids. It seemed almost as if they couldn't both be real—the man who had written that note to the girl who had acknowledged its receipt across the footlights with that slanting, half-contemptuous nod, and the man who now fumbled for his pocketbook and drew out one of his cards and handed it across to her.

"That was what they called my job down there," he said a little awkwardly.

She looked at him very straight and rather intently before she read what was on the card, and when she did the color had flushed up into her cheeks, too. But something in what he said caught, a little tardily, her attention.

"Was?" she questioned. "Do you mean you've quit?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've earned a three months' leave. I swore when I left Colon that if I could get any decent sort of job up here I wouldn't go back."

The girl gave an incredulous little laugh. "That's funny," she said. "If I'd had a job like that, you couldn't have pried me loose. It's none of my busi-

ness," she went on apologetically and rather embarrassed, for he was looking at her intently, with a frown between his brows. "But I should think you'd want to stay right there until you'd put that hunk of mud on the everlasting blink. Somebody'll stay there, I suppose, till it's done, but—well, it won't be you." She looked away from him and laughed rather nervously. "That's a real job," she concluded. "Gee!"

They flickered the lights just then as a hint that it had got to be one o'clock, and their waiter was demonstratively waiting to be asked for the check. But the abstraction into which her last comment had thrown him was too deep to be broken, even by paying it. He would, indeed, have handed over his watch to a regular highwayman without paying him the compliment of full attention.

"It's easier to see that," he said at last, "when you get away from it than when you're right down there in the Ditch. Down there you know the grind that begins every day at half-past six, and you know the heat, and the wind that comes roaring down the cut all the time and never stops. And you know that you're trying to deliver a little more than a man really can. You feel a long way off, feel that life—a regular white man's life—is going on without you; that nobody knows what you're doing and nobody cares. And at night you get frightened—lonesome."

The word rang a bell, somehow. He didn't know why. He'd forgotten that he had used it in the note that went with the orchids, but it waked him up with a jerk—brought him back to the restaurant where the others were making up for their diminishing numbers by an increased hilarity—brought him back to the champagne bottle in its bucket of half-melted ice and what had long ceased to sparkle in their glasses.

He thrust back his chair a little abruptly.

The girl had sat back a little, too, but there was no relaxation about her attitude. Every line of her was drawn taut, and her hands were gripping the sides of the chair.

"I mustn't keep you any longer," he said. "You've got a job, too. And you aren't on leave. I'll get a taxi and send you home."

Still he didn't move to rise, and neither did she. But she leaned suddenly forward with wide eyes and parted lips. He was looking at his hands which showed so brown against the white table edge they were gripping.

"And to-morrow," he said, "—to-morrow, if I may, I'll try to say thank you for—for having held out a hand to a fellow that needed it."

"Oh!" said Daisy.

It's a funny world, to be sure, and the morals of things are obscure and hard to find. You would hardly

have picked her out at first glance for a Good Samaritan as she came out on the stage in her feather boa and her large muff. Nor for that matter, the man in the first row, writing his note and sending his orchids. Yet that is what each of them turned out—so far as the other was concerned—to be. And without in the least meaning to. There must have been a spiritual prophylactic somewhere in the situation.

They didn't waste much time on the puzzle—had something better to think about, I suppose. But ever since I heard the story, I've been wondering.

It seems absurd to give the credit to the scene-painter. And yet—where else?

THE SPOON TUNE

THE Slob played the clarinet in the Globe Theater orchestra. He played it badly, but better than he played the viola or the cornet. He was the worst pianist in the world. His fingers came down on the keys with the force of pile-drivers. The hideous results he got were a matter of complete indifference to the Slob. He knew what his music ought to sound like, right enough. He played the piano in rehearsals.

As far as externals went, the nickname unanimously accorded him at the Globe is a sufficient description. To put it less inelegantly, he was fat, untidy, indifferently clean. His dull, near-sighted eyes, his thick face, his unwieldy body, expressed nothing. He didn't seem to care to talk. Ten times a week—they played three matinees at the Globe; Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday—he took his place in the orchestra pit and played the clarinet. That was all anybody knew about him.

I don't know why they called it the Globe, rather than the Hippodrome or the Colosseum, or the Olympic. It seated, by a miracle of packing, six hundred

and seventy-eight persons, and it seated the same persons oftener than any other theater in town. For it seemed that finding one's way into the side street where it stood, wedging up the steep stair, squeezing into one of its narrow seats, for which one paid a dollar, and breathing its indescribable air for two more or less rapturous hours, was an easy habit for a large class of the population to get into.

How the Globe got past the fire and building ordinances is a mystery which this story is not concerned with. And I hasten to add that this is not the story of how it burned up at last and how the Slob rescued the beautiful soubrette. The Globe still plods its vulgar, artless and highly pecunious little way. I am talking of it in the past tense merely for purposes of convenience.

Sometimes the Globe got through a whole season with one show, but more often it took two. This didn't matter, because the shows were always exactly alike. Not exactly musical comedies, whatever they, exactly, are; certainly not operettas nor melodramas; just Globe shows.

There was a slangy, melancholy and misunderstood hero, modeled after George M. Cohan's blacker mood, and an alluring but cruel heroine who sang two songs, one in each act, on a dark stage, with the calcium. There was a grotesque comic lady and a pretty sou-

brette. And the comedian was always a jovial soul with a touch of pathos about him who got into all sorts of difficulties in the process of trying to solve everybody else's.

These principals came and went. After playing a year or more before the doting favor of Globe audiences they generally succumbed to what the alienists call delusions of greatness, and went away to burn up New York. There were always plenty more where they came from. And anyway, the real star of a Globe show was the chorus.

There were twenty-four girls in it—let's forget about the chorus men—twenty-four girls graded in sizes by eights, and they were the most industrious chorus in the world. They demonstrated possibilities of under-dressing that staggered the most sophisticated. It was nothing for them to appear at the rise of the curtain as a field of sunflowers, transform themselves into a pack of cards, and then flutter away *en masse* as an aeroplane. They were disguised quaintly as drawing-room chairs, or sailboats or café tables. They were rolled on in beer kegs, spilled out of clothes hampers.

What made it really marvelous was the fact that the stage at the Globe had practically no wings at all and that the back drop, to gain space, was generally painted directly on the bricks; so that in order to enter, right,

after an exit, left, you had to charge down a spiral iron stair, thread your way through a crooked passage between the dressing-rooms and climb another flight at the opposite side. At that, the Globe chorus would do a caterpillar crawl across the stage, dressed to begin with as duchesses' daughters and then as bathing girls, keeping the line continuous all the time, while the wardrobe mistress gathered up the discarded garments down below.

And all ten times a week!

Still, you are not to think of them as weary victims of toil: sad, drawn-faced martyrs, summoning a brave smile with the thought that it was all to raise the mortgage or to send brother to college; keeping up a false gaiety before the cruel, lynx-eyed audience and dropping it exhausted as they staggered into the wings. On the contrary, they giggled on the stairways, hummed little tunes while they dressed, pranced in the crowded wings. They really liked it. They were young, and it was pleasant to kick their legs and raise their indifferently melodious voices.

And after all, the work was not so hard as general housework in the suburbs, or as stitching handkerchiefs on a scientifically speeded power-machine, or as stamping eyelets in upper leathers. Some of them could have told you that authoritatively.

There was one girl in the chorus who could really

sing. The Slob discovered this fact long before any one else did. Her voice picked itself out for him automatically from the ruck, whether on the stage or amid the racket below the stage before the overture call when the orchestra was tuning up. It was clear, fresh, open-throated, with the "bead" on it that comes from perfect natural placing. And it was always squarely in the middle of the note.

It never occurred to him to wonder what she looked like. Of course, he couldn't see her from where he sat in the pit, and he probably would not have looked if he could. If he had he would have seen a snub-nosed, bow-legged little thing, with an impudently big chin and a broad-beamed smile.

She didn't know she could sing. And she would have laughed if any one had been crazy enough to tell her that there was something about that ugly little mug of hers that would some day charm men out of their wits. You will hear more about her presently.

The permanent staff of the Globe included a librettist and a composer in ordinary. Of the mental processes, if that is what they were, of the librettist, I do not feel competent to speak. They are beyond my ken. But the method of the Composer was simplicity itself.

In the evening he would drop in at one of the restaurants, a roof garden if it happened to be sum-

mer, order a good many drinks, chat with his friends and listen to the orchestra. You know what a restaurant orchestra plays. Classic music as follows: Rubinstein's *Melody in F,* the Barcarolle from the *Tales of Hoffman,* a potpourri from *Faust,* and the overture to *William Tell.* Oh, yes, and the Intermezzo from *Cavaleria.* And at the other end of the scale, the latest song hits, whatever they happen to be. Not infrequently, they were the Composer's own compositions. But in between this pabulum for the high-brow and the low, lies a great mass of the comic opera music of the early and middle nineteenth century, Auber, Offenbach, Von Suppe, and best of all, Johann Strauss, alone an inexhaustible mine for a recreative genius like the Composer.

After he had listened for an hour or so to things like *The Black Domino* or *The Light Cavalry,* he would go home and go to bed, contented and tolerably drunk. By noon the next day, when the fog began to lift, he would find himself in possession of a tune or two.

The critics were fond of saying he stole them, but this was not fair, either to the tunes or to the Composer. He tortured their rhythms, twisted their phrases, got a catch and drag into them, an insistent pulsation against the beat, as light as the last flicker of the rag over a polished shoe. He soaked them full of a sticky, sappy sentimentality until they fairly

dripped; until their original composers would have fled from them in horror. When he was through with them and turned on the phonograph so that they could properly be recorded, they might fairly be called his.

The records, with appropriate lyrics fitted to the tunes, then went over to the Musical Director—the one person in this tale who is presented as an object of pity—who scored them up for chorus and orchestra and arranged a mélange of them for the finales to the two acts. And there you were.

The Stage Director thought up new and more impossible stunts for the chorus, the specialties of the principals were arranged for and W. Ransome Lord, the owner of the theater, began coming to rehearsals, sitting irresponsibly on the back of an orchestra chair and whistling the tunes he liked. Eventually the show was produced and ran anywhere from two hundred and fifty to five hundred times, at the end of which time, the Composer and the Librettist were ready with another. You might think the series would have gone on forever.

But success bred discontent in the Composer, and familiarity bred contempt in the Manager and a sudden unfathomable abyss opened up between them. Before any one had time to realize what had happened, the Composer had shaken the dust of the Globe—a pe-

culiarly felicitous expression in this case—from his feet and departed. The Globe rocked to its foundations, but W. Ransome Lord was not the man to confess defeat easily. He summoned the Musical Director to his office.

In a corner was a heap, whose dimensions must have been ten or twelve cubic feet, of musical scores, hopefully submitted during the past half-dozen years, to the management of the Globe. The legend runs, that when the Musical Director went through them, he found no less than three Broadway successes. But you need not believe that unless you like.

Anyway, he did find a show which, he assured the Manager, would do admirably. "Perhaps in some of the others, you might find a tune or two that would buck it up a bit," the Boss suggested.

"No," said the Musical Director. "Ass it stants it will be the best thing the Clobe hass yet broduced." W. Ransome Lord might have recognized a portent of failure in this opinion, but he didn't.

So the Librettist fitted it out with a new plot and lyrics, and everybody went cheerfully to work. But the cheer did not hold very well. A feeling of homesickness, of something gone, struck in and began to spread. The longer the thing was rehearsed, the higher the vacuum grew. And when at last the Boss appeared in front, and, instead of whistling, smoked;

and when the effluvium of his cigar, renewed, phoenix-like from its ashes, began drifting in thicker and thicker clouds across the footlights, you could have taken up the gloom with a shovel. For four days he listened and never spoke a word. Then in the middle of the second act, he came down the aisle.

"You may as well give it up," he said. "There's nothing doing. I've been here four times through, and I haven't picked up a tune yet."

There was a tense little silence. The Stage Manager, Freddy Boldt, with a masterly shrug, indicated that he had predicted this from the first. The Comedian gave him a furtive nod of assent. The rest of the people on the stage, about half the chorus and a couple of principals, just held their breaths. The Musical Director laid down the lead pencil with which he alternately beat time for the chorus and marked changes in the score.

"Ass to the music," he said, "I gif you my wort it iss good. Very nice. It hass charm and some orich-inality."

The Boss heaved a sigh that had a sort of Olympian finality about it. "They don't want charm and originality," he said. "They want something to whistle."

After that the silence was longer. On the stage they were shifting their feet uneasily, wishing the thunderbolt they saw gathering would strike. The

Director picked up his pencil again and balanced it on unsteady fingers. The Boss drew faster on his cigar. Then suddenly:

"Listen!" he said.

Except for the abnormal silence it could not have been heard at all. It was not loud and it came from rather far away, down in the caverns somewhere below the stage. But it came up, clear, fresh, open-throated, a slow waltz tune with a sort of saccharine, sticky drip to it, like maple sirup on a cold morning.

It went into eclipse for a moment, as if the unconscious singer were suddenly diverted to something of more immediate importance; then it came again. There were no words to it.

The Boss drew a long breath. "That's it," he said. "What is it?"

If they had thought to look over at the Slob, who had sat stolidly on the piano chair through it all, they might have seen a frown of perplexed recognition on his face. But nobody did. So they just looked blank.

The tune intermitted, then came again. This time the Comedian began to hum it, too. The Boss checked him with a gesture. "Listen," he said again. So they waited while she sang it through.

"Who is she?" demanded the Boss.

They all looked blank again. The Slob knew who she was well enough, that is to say, he recognized the

voice; but telling them that she was the one person in the company who could really sing would not have helped much. And he had no other identification.

"Well," said the Boss, after another silence, "why don't you find her and bring her up?"

The assistant stage manager, one of the chorus men, slipped away to the spiral stair. At the end of half a minute the singing stopped abruptly. Two minutes more and he came back with her.

She was half dressed and huddled into a soiled kimono, half put on, and she looked frightened. But even so, with her big eyes and her big impudent chin, she looked funny. Made you want to smile at her and tell her not to mind.

The Slob never looked around. His piano was placed so that he watched the Director, not the chorus; but most people would have risked a crick in the neck to see what she was like. That never even occurred to him.

"Was it you singing down there?" asked the Boss.

She was frightened. She had to swallow a couple of times before she could make the words come.

"Y-yes, sir," she said. "—I didn't mean . . ."

"That's all right," said the Boss cheerfully, from around his cigar. "What was it?"

She could not make out what he wanted.

"What was the song? What was the name of it? Don't you know?"

"N-no, sir."

"What are the words? Where did you hear it?"

"I don't know," said the chorus girl. Then, getting the idea at last, that it was the tune he was interested in and not her delinquency in having interrupted the rehearsal, she came out of her daze. "I been singing it all morning. It's stuck in my head ever since I waked up. But there aren't any words."

"Call Lou," commanded the Boss. "He knows every song there is."

Lou was the Press Agent; and as the alley saloon was hardly a dozen paces from the stage door, there was little time lost carrying out that order.

"Sing it again," said the Boss.

The Musical Director turned to the Slob. "Give her a chord."

But she had not heard the order and did not wait. The fact that she had absolute pitch was no surprise to the Slob. She turned loose a little, just letting her body mark the rhythm. She did not really sing out, of course, because she had no words.

There was a momentary silence when she came to the end. Then—

"Where'd you get it?" asked the Press Agent.

He'd never heard of it, either! They explained the situation to him swiftly.

"Perhaps you made it up yourself," he suggested to the chorus girl.

"I guess I must uv," she assented seriously. "I sort of heard it while I was asleep this morning, and when I waked up, there it was."

"We'll take a chance," decided the Boss. He turned suddenly on the Librettist. "Fit some words to it," he ordered.

"Got 'em already," said the Librettist. "A tune like that makes its own words. It's called *The Spoon Tune.*"

He scrambled on to the stage. He and the chorus girl and the Musical Director gathered round the Slob at the piano.

"Can you harmonize it?" asked the Director.

The Slob nodded and began. It was better than ever with the harmonies. He took it out of the key on the third bar and trickled down the dominant sept of the relative minor.

"That's right!" cried the chorus girl. "That's the way it goes!"

The Librettist was saying over the words in time to the music.

The Boss and the Press Agent remained out in front.

"I've a mind to let her sing it," said the Boss.

"In the show?" asked the Press Agent.

The Boss nodded. "She can cut figure eights around that other dame," he said.

"It's a good story, all right," said Lou Heminway dubiously. "Composes her own songs in her sleep—but—well, look at her looks!"

It was evident that the Press Agent didn't know an ugly duckling when he saw one.

The Boss smoked a while. "I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "Made up right, she'd be a ringer for Fritzi. You never can tell. She might just romp home with it."

"Anyway," said Lou, who at least didn't need a straw to tell which way the wind was blowing—"anyway, the other one is a quince."

"Lou," demanded the Boss earnestly, "are you dead sure it's all right? Suppose it's just something we haven't happened to hear?"

"I tell you," rejoined the Press Agent, "that song couldn't be uncovered a week before everybody'd be whistling it. Talk about your *Merry Widows!* It's a pipe, that's what it is!"

The girl had got the words by now, and she sang the song through once more. Only this time her body caught the lilt of it to the full, and her voice rang, clear and golden as a winter sunrise. The Boss and the

Press Agent exchanged joyously whispered blasphemies.

"Come down here," said the Boss, when she had finished. So she came just as she was, looking funnier than ever, big-eyed, expectant and still half scared, in her indecent little kimono. "You can sing that song in the show," he told her. "And we'll dress a chorus for it. You can come to the office after the rehearsal for a contract."

"Do I get my name in the program?" she asked, with a sudden gleam of boldness.

The Boss nodded. "Sure," he said.

"What is it?" asked the Press Agent.

"Amie Belleaire." She achieved it triumphantly.

The Press Agent took off his derby hat, struck a dent in it and knocked it out again. "Let's have a try at your real name," he suggested weakly.

"It's Jane Gray," she admitted.

"I got you," said the Press Agent. "There you are."

The Boss had moved a pace or two away. Now he stopped and turned back.

"Look here," he said. "One song doesn't make a show. Not any more than one swallow makes a drink, as they say. You better dream us another to-morrow morning."

"But—but what if . . ." stammered little Jane.

"Oh, well, day after to-morrow, then. Don't strain

yourself. But come across with it. There isn't any time to lose, really."

He went back to the stage where the Stage and Musical Directors and the Librettist were already deep in an animated confab. All the others had been straining their ears to hear the conversation out in front.

"Don't you worry," said the Press Agent, interpreting her look. "There must be plenty more where that came from."

After the rehearsal, and the thrilling five minutes in the office, little Jane hurried straight home, with her precious contract buttoned up for safety inside her blouse. It was not her habit to do this, because the old show was still running and she had to be back at the theater at seven-fifteen in order to complete the rather complicated dressing called for in the first half of the first act. The outer layer was, as a guest at a fashionable hotel, in an elaborate, ankle-length ball gown, which, as you know, the guests at fashionable hotels always wear in the morning. Under that came a pair of khaki-colored breeches, for the taxi chorus, and under these had to be the silk fleshings for the *Starlight Serenade,* which came fifteen minutes after the curtain went up.

But the thought of eating dinner with the other girls to-night, at their regular white front restaurant, made her sick. It was surprisingly uncomfortable to

be too happy. Her teeth chattered and she felt all gone inside, and she knew it would be torture to try to talk. She just wanted to be alone in her own little room, for a while, with the door shut behind her.

The worst turn came as she passed the twenty-four-sheet stand at her own corner. For suddenly she had a vision of her own name on it in letters five feet high. This reconciled her, though, to the Press Agent's arbitrary substitution of her own name for Amie Belleaire. Jane Gray could go in much bigger letters. Perhaps he had been right about it.

When she had reached her haven and shut the door and sat down in her little splint rocker, and when the crackle inside her blouse gave comforting proof that the contract was still there, she let herself go. She called it thinking, but it was not that. Just remembering the events of that wonderful day. How sour the Quince had been! And how jovial the Comedian. And how sweet the other girls were about it, most of them.

The Spoon Tune came back into her head. What fun it was to sing it all by herself! To have that delightful clear strip down stage to move about in, untrammeled. And to have everybody else listening, swaying a little, unconsciously, to her rhythm. They had done that to-day; even the Manager himself.

The thought of him, though, brought back, uncom-

fortably, his injunction to "dream another." Had she dreamed it, really? Had she ever dreamed a tune before? There must, the Press Agent said, be plenty more where that one came from. She remembered a sort of penetrating flash in his eye when he said it, that suggested doubts. She didn't care. She had told the truth about it. But as to dreaming another . . .

An interruption came just then; a familiar interruption that made her jump up with a rather inadequate little swear word and slam down her window. It was a burst of hideous din, extracted from what must once have been a piano. It came from somewhere across the alley. One could hardly account for it except on a basis of malicious dislike for one's innocent neighbors, coupled with a perfectly inhuman ingenuity. It was no passing whim, either. The man who did it used to keep it up for hours. And not only late at night, when it didn't so much matter, but early in the morning, when a hard-working chorus girl needed her sleep. Why only this very morning, before she was half awa . . .!

And little Jane clapped her hand to her mouth, as if to shut off the admission before it was fairly made, and dropped limply back into her splint rocker.

That was where *The Spoon Tune* had come from! She could hear it now in memory, just as she had heard

it this morning, worming its way into her slumbers. It was being played on that awful brass piano!

She felt herself going a little giddy. She would have to go back to the theater and tell. And they would take the song away from her and put her back in the chorus. And how wild they would be, into the bargain!

But what was she to tell? Could she be sure, after all? Perhaps the dream had really been hers, and the noise of the brass piano had only got mixed up with it, accidentally. Certainly she had never heard anything like a tune played upon it when she was awake. No. She couldn't be sure. Of course, if she should hear him play it again . .

At that she sprang up, pinned on her hat again with two frantic stabs of her long pins, and fled from the diabolical din of that pianist like Eliza across the ice. When she was far beyond the pursuing sound of it, she still hurried along, breathless, and she did not feel really safe until she was on the elevated.

She turned up at rehearsal next morning, triumphant, but sleepy. Her expedient had been that of the little pig in the fable. She had risen at the crack of dawn,—well, at nine o'clock, then, if you will be literal —and escaped before the demon pianist got started. And so completely had this new scare put the other worry out of her mind, that she was genuinely aston-

ished when Freddy Boldt appeared in the midst of things, called her out by name, and asked her if she had dreamed that other tune yet.

"N-no, sir," she said. "I d-don't believe I can."

"Why not—if you could dream one?" the Manager demanded. "Joe"—this was the name of the departed Composer—"Joe used to dream his tunes, but he came across with one whenever we wanted it."

She hadn't anything to say to that, so he waited a minute. "You'd better come across, too," he concluded.

"I'll try," she stammered, and the rehearsal went on. But the joy of it was gone, for little Jane.

And the next morning, of course, she overslept. Slept like one of the original seven, until something, coming in through the window, made her turn and twist, this way and that, and rub her little fists into her eyes, and finally, before they were half open, sit straight up, huddling her nightgown up around her throat as if the invader's actual presence in the room, instead of just the sound of him from across the alley, had been what roused her. The little pig had failed to get the start of the wolf, this morning.

For it was a tune the brass piano was playing, this time. Only not her tune. Not *The Spoon Tune.*

It was quite the soundest, archest little tune you can imagine. It marched demurely up four steps,

scalewise, and then went back and marched up again, with a swaggering insistence on the beat. And then it fell into temptation, caught sight of something amusing going by, most likely, and tripped and lagged into a most impudently alluring bit of rag-time. But the next minute, as if the eye of authority had fallen upon it, it straightened up and marched on again.

Little Jane clapped her hands softly, and the next time over she hummed it under her breath. So far, this was just the instinctive musician in her. She heard it through once more before she began thinking what it meant.

The first thing she thought was, how perfectly it would go at the Globe. She could fairly see the chorus swinging across to that little march, breaking at the rag, and then marching on again. It was exactly what the Manager wanted her to "dream." And here it was, like a gift.

At that she caught her breath and a faint flush came up into her cheeks, under the bloom of last night's make-up.

Why mightn't it be a gift?

You are to remember that in little Jane's world, valuable gifts from strangers were no uncommon phenomena. The strangers did not mean to remain strangers, and the gifts were not given without the expectation of a quid pro quo. But that was how they

came. Plenty of her friends got rings and things that way. Or sometimes ten-dollar bills stuck in the middle of a bunch of violets.

That attentions of this sort had not come to little Jane, was not, as she supposed, because she wasn't pretty, but because, even there in the chorus, she was too much of a person. Her impudent, self-reliant little way charmed nearly everybody. But she did not look like easy enough prey, and your rounder is no great sportsman. It is the drooping little rosebud mouths, and the washed-out eyes that he is looking for. If little Jane could have known this, she would have been spared some bitter hours of envy.

Of course, she had longed for a romance of her own. There must be a hero somewhere, a dark man with a tragic smile, who would love her in heart-broken silence a long time before he declared himself, and then would turn out to be a duke or something, in disguise. She had been reading the *First Violin* lately and that had turned her thoughts to the orchestra. None of the violins would do, but there was a 'cellist, with lank black hair brushed straight back from his forehead, and melting eyes, who was a potential hero, at least. Though, of course, you never could tell.

Perhaps he . . .

The tune came in again. She scrambled out of bed,

made for the window, and knelt there, so that nothing but her head showed above the sash. She had always blamed the whole opposite block impartially, hitherto, for the din of the brass piano. Now she particularized; looked and listened, turning her head this way and that until she settled it. They were the third floor windows in the third house from the corner. Then she got up, pulled down her blind—a most unusual precaution with her, it must be confessed—and dressed as fast as she could. When she was dressed, she went around the corner into the next street and rang the bell of the third house.

Not with any real idea that she was going to find her hero, then and there. Little Jane might dream romances, but she acted, as a rule, pretty good common sense. It was more than likely that the man who played the new tune, had played *The Spoon Tune,* too. Of course, until she actually heard him play it she was safe. Still, before matters went any further she would do well to find out who he was.

The method was easy enough. When the slatternly maid of all work came to the door, little Jane asked to look at rooms. A harassed-looking landlady was summoned. Little Jane's chin stood her in good stead here. It looked responsible; like paying the rent. So she was led all over the house. First floor, second floor . . .

Yes, she had picked the right house. Just as they reached the third floor, a surpassing burst of discords was smashed out of the brass piano. The effect of it at close range like this, was almost terrifying.

"He's a fine player," said the justifiably mendacious landlady. "Only, it's a shame, he don't get time to touch the piano from one week's end to another."

She waited for no comment from Jane, but rushed to the offending door, knocked loudly and opened it enough to stick her head in.

"Time for your rehearsal, Mr. . . ." Jane heard her say, but could not quite catch the name. "Yes, it is. Your watch must be slow. Oh, that's all right. Glad to remind you."

There was sound of upheaval behind the door as the landlady came back. Jane had hardly bargained for this. There was no retreat. Yes, there was. She squeezed into a little alcove niche. If the landlady didn't speak to him, he'd probably go right by without seeing her. There! The door was opening again. He was coming. Romance was in the saddle. Little Jane held her breath.

Poor little Jane!

You know who it was she saw. But you probably do not see, just at first, all it meant to her, when it was the Slob, looking fatter and untidier than ever, who walked by, so close that he almost touched her,

—how she squeezed back into that little alcove!—and began making his clumsy way down-stairs.

He would not have seen her if the landlady had not spoken to him, after all. It was only some harmless remark about doing out his room, but it brought him back two steps at a time. Under no circumstances except fire, was his room to be entered at all. He was in the midst of a very energetic statement of his wishes, when suddenly he stopped and looked straight into the alcove.

Little Jane did not meet his eye, but she could feel it going all over her. There was a silence that seemed to last minutes. Then he turned away and went down-stairs again.

"You mustn't mind Mr. Stubbs," said the landlady consolingly. "He's very absent-minded."

His name was Stubbs!

Alas for Romance! Alas for little Jane! Why couldn't it have been somebody else? Anybody else!

It had been a gift, all right, that second little tune. And for that matter, *The Spoon Tune,* too, was turned from a find to a gift by the gift of the second. But the giver!

Of course, he was in love with her. In love, you are to understand, in the precise sense in which the chorus girls at the Globe habitually make use of the phrase. Little Jane understood, well enough. There

was no pleasant vagueness in her mind as to what, on her part, the acceptance of the gift would involve. The moral code was strict, in such matters, too. The girl who evaded her obligations—well, she was just a welsher, that was all.

Little Jane felt pretty sick when she turned up on the stage for rehearsal that morning. All the way down-town, she had meant to tell them that she had not dreamed *The Spoon Tune,* after all. And that she knew she could never dream another. But when it came to the point, she hadn't the courage. How should she answer the questions they would be sure to ask? She could not tell them who the author was. Really, she didn't know. She had told them the truth before, as she had believed it, and she had no real proof to the contrary.

But at the other tune she stuck. No, she hadn't dreamed another, and she was perfectly sure she never could. All through the miserable scene, while the Manager seemed to threaten, in an indirect and terrifying way, and the Press Agent urged in a way more cynical and terrifying still, her eyes kept straying to the broad shapeless back of the man the landlady had called Stubbs. He never turned a glance at her. Of course, he was only waiting. Because he knew she knew. Hadn't he seen her there, just outside his own door?

She stuck it out for four days. Then they got her; just as, in an unconsciously hopeless way, she had known from the start they would. In a thin, scared little voice, from a throat that was numb with misery she sang the little march tune, that broke into rag-time so alluringly.

And still the Slob never looked at her. Oh, but he'd be waiting after the rehearsal. Well, hadn't he a right to?

And sure enough, he was. At least, as she emerged from the alley into the little side street, there he stood, his clarinet case under his arm—for there had been an orchestra rehearsal after theirs was over—gazing blankly at one of the bills that was already up, announcing the new show.

It would have been easy enough to slip by. But little Jane held her breath and clenched her hands and went and stood beside him. For a minute he seemed unconscious of her presence there. Then he straightened up a little and his eyes came round.

Really, if she could have known, it was the catch in her own breathing that did it. The trembling of her indrawn breath, and the little choking noise that was almost a sob. And if she could have seen the look that came into his mild dull eyes, as he turned them on her and watched as she fled away down the street . . .

Yes, that is what she did. She just couldn't stand it, that was all. She never tried again after that. And it was pitifully easy to avoid him. Little Jane had welshed.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that after the first night little Jane and *The Spoon Tune* owned the show. Nor will it surprise you to be told that, being a natural comedienne as well as a natural singer, she departed, when her contract was out, for wider fields and larger honors. The next time she appeared in the town that had seen her beginnings she was singing the part that had made Clementini famous in *Mary, Mary!* And she was getting three-fifty a week.

John Stubbs knew nothing of all this. In fact, on the Sunday when she reached town, he didn't know much of anything. He had been ill for a good many weeks. On this day he was far enough convalescent to put on his clothes and sit up a little, but that was about all. He lay back weakly in the old Morris chair the landlady had loaned him and stared out at the snow-covered housetops, rather glad, if the truth be told, that nothing more was to be expected of him yet. Of course, when he got a little stronger he would have to go to work again and pay what he owed the landlady.

She was the same landlady who had vainly shown her rooms to little Jane, and his room was still the

same one she had come to the very door of, riding the big horse of Romance and coming so sad a cropper. But John Stubbs knew nothing of that, either.

Consequently, when there came a smart little knock at his door, and his voice mechanically said, "Come in," though he didn't much want to see anybody, and the door opened, and he saw standing there a smart little figure in a hemispherical hat down over her ears, and a sealskin ulster and a big chinchilla muff, he was about as surprised as a man could be.

"Don't you know me?" she asked, though the look in his face made it plain enough that he did not. "Have you forgotten me?"

Certainly he had never known any one like that. But he smiled because you had to smile when you looked at her. "I guess you must have made a mistake," he said.

"I'm Jane Gray."

It is to be doubted if he had ever noticed what her name was. Certainly it did not help him solve the mystery of her appearance now.

"And I'm John Stubbs," he told her. "Now, isn't it a mistake?"

She looked at him for a minute with an odd expression in her piquant little face. Then, instead of going away as he expected her to do, she shut the door after her and pulled the pins out of her hat.

"Don't you remember the little chorus girl who sang the Spoon Song?"

"I guess there was a mistake, all right," she said enigmatically, "but I'm not making it now." And at that she took off the hat and her coat, too, and laid them with her muff on the old square piano.

Then she went over, quite close to him, and looked very straight into his face. "Don't you remember the little chorus girl at the Globe, who sang *The Spoon Tune?*"

Musicians nowadays are in the habit of calling John Stubbs the greatest comic genius America has produced since Mark Twain. (Of course, since his only form of expression is musical and since the public that can take a musical joke is small, his fame is not what it might be.) So perhaps you will see how this memory of *The Spoon Tune* struck him. He wasn't strong enough yet to laugh, really; but as the thought of it came back to him, his grin widened and widened and a colossal chuckle shook him.

"The Spoon Tune," he repeated joyously. "Bless you, yes! That was very, very funny."

But perhaps you will also see that it didn't strike Jane Gray that way at all, though her comic sense was as good as anybody's. She frowned and asked, "Why?"

"Well, you see," he told her, "I was sketching up a comic symphony called *America.* I've only just finished it this winter. I wanted to get everything Amer-

ican into it. The energy and nerve, you see, and the idealism and along with it the humor—pretty primitive after all though we're so proud of it. Mutt and Jeff, you know. One other thing I wanted to get was the sentimentality. The sappy, sloppy slush that we're so everlastingly hungry for. Well, it struck me that I couldn't do better than take the sort of thing they like at the Globe and burlesque it. So I made up a tune that went the limit; far enough beyond anything they'd done, I thought, to be recognized as funny. But when they heard you singing it—was it really you they brought up on the stage that day?—when they heard it they just ate it up. The thing can't be burlesqued, you see."

That speech didn't go as far over little Jane's head as you are likely to think. She had been hard at work getting educated as her governess-companion could testify. And so far as music went, she was just born that way. She took to symphony concerts like a kitten to milk. Oh, yes, she saw what he meant well enough. But she went on looking at him in silence for a full minute after he had finished

"You made up another tune for me, didn't you?" she said at last.

"So I did," he assented. "I'd forgotten all about that."

She was sitting sidewise on the piano chair, nursing

her chin in the crotch of her elbow; her gaze, direct as a child's, straight into his face.

"Those two songs of yours made me, you know," she went on rather deliberately after another silence. "From a poor little devil of a chorus girl into whatever I am now. And I'm going to be better than this."

"They just gave you your chance a little sooner," he protested. He turned his head awkwardly away from the penetrating gaze that held him so persistently.

"Lot's of people don't ever get their chance—until it's too late," she said. Then, for the first time she looked away from him, and as she went on speaking she stammered a little.

"And it didn't seem—even queer to you—that I took your two songs, and never offered to—pay."

"Pay!" he echoed. "How in the world could you have paid?"

At that, to his astonished consternation, her eyes flushed up with tears, not contradicted altogether by the curious and rather shaky smile that bent her lips. She was looking straight at him again, and she did not reach for a handkerchief or anything; just blinked and gave her head an impatient little shake so that the tears fell in two big drops on her arm.

"And you didn't mind," she went on, "that I never even said, 'Thank you' that time you waited for me after the rehearsal?"

"But I never did," he protested. "And how could you thank me when you didn't know where the tunes came from?"

"But I did know. And you knew I knew. Didn't you see me standing here in the little niche just outside your door that morning! Why, you looked straight at me for about a minute! Stared!"

He shook his head in humorous despair. "I never see anybody when I do that. It's just a horrible, absent-minded habit."

Another silence.

"So," she summed up at last, "you made up that second tune just to help out a poor, scared little thing who needed it. Without any idea of ever being paid, or thanked, or even of her knowing who helped her. And you let her keep the one that she'd already, without knowing it, stolen from you. And I suppose you never thought that they must both have been worth a lot of money."

She got up and went around the piano to where her muff was. He thought she was going, but there was something in the muff that she wanted. She went on talking with her back to him.

"They wouldn't pay me any royalties on *The Spoon Tune*. They said I'd contributed that to the show and that I was paid by their letting me sing it. But I held out, on the other, and I've always kept the money I

got for it, separate. So that when I got a chance I could give it back to you."

She broke off, there, and while she was fishing her bag out of her muff and a big roll of something out of the bag, he heard her give a queer little laugh. She was thinking of the speech she had always meant to make when she gave that carefully hoarded money back. The speech she had been rehearsing for two years—a sort of Take-back-your-gold affair. It was funny, even if she did feel more like crying than like laughing over it now.

When she turned around with it in her hands and went over and held them out to him, the speech proved rather a simple matter.

"It's yours," she said. "Yes, of course, it's yours. It's twenty-eight hundred and forty-one dollars and fifty cents. The song really was a hit, you know. But —will it be enough? To get you out of here, into a decent room, and buy a proper piano and publish your symphony? That's what you want to do, isn't it? If—if it isn't enough . . . This—this isn't from me, you see. It's just what has been yours all the time. And—and I wish I could do something, too—myself."

He took the two hands she held out to him, anyway, and the twenty-eight one-hundred-dollar bills and the two twenties and the one and the half dollar that made

it exact, all dropped unheeded in the folds of his dressing gown.

Of course, they argued about it a good while. At least, he argued. Little Jane didn't. The syllogism is not the only thing in the world that carries conviction. And at last his resistance weakened and died.

After that they had a long, cozy talk, interrupted by an excursion of little Jane's in search of the landlady, ostensibly, at least, for tea. And after tea she stayed on until it was almost dark. Then she got up to go, telling him that he must go back to bed so as to be strong enough to-morrow to go shopping with her for a piano. In a properly warmed automobile, of course.

But just before she went she did a very mean thing. She sat down at his dreadful little old brass piano, and sketched as lightly as she could, a drippy, sappy little prelude. And then she began to sing.

Oh, it wasn't fair at all. You aren't responsible when you're just getting over a bad attack of double pneumonia. You'll cry over anything. And then that golden voice of hers, warm, tender, poignant as the smell of an April morning!

She turned around and caught him drawing his sleeve across his eyes. Her own were wet, and though her broad smile had more than a hint of mockery in it, it was a bit tremulous about the edges.

"I don't know that it's such a joke after all, that little *Spoon Tune,*" she said.

BRUNETTE MEDIUM

WE were a very sophisticated lot, down at the Globe Theater, beginning with the carriage man out in front and not ending till you came to the stage doorkeeper on the alley. If the carriage man's function was rather ornamental than necessary—and being a dollar house we could not expect more than an occasional taxi, though the stage door did quite a thriving business in that way after the show—the way he rose to his rare occasions was wonderful. He opened the door and helped you down with an air that admitted he knew perfectly well who you were, but assured you that you might rely upon him to be discreet about it.

The man in the box office was breezier, as befitted his more democratic occupation, breezier, but just as wise. He was glad to see you back, old chap; too bad he had nothing nearer the stage for you. Then the ushers exchanged knowing glances and cryptic remarks as they passed each other in the aisle, and the orchestra leader, during the show, frequently indulged in esoteric jocularities with the principals at which the first five rows of the audience always rocked with laughter

to show that they were, as Lou Heminway, the press agent, would say, contiguous.

To tell the truth they were afraid not to laugh at any of the meaningful obscurities that came across. If they didn't—well, the way the featured lady from one of the London "halls" or the second comedian whose "line" may be horticulturally described as hardy perennials (they had persisted immune to frost since the days of Hanlon's *Superba*)—the way either of these worthies could josh a slow audience when their more recondite points failed to register was something to scare a knowing snicker out of anybody.

We were all in the family and we were all in the know, an oasis, a rather moist and luxuriant oasis, in a vast desert of unsophistication. Why, the bartenders outside the Loop didn't even know Lou Heminway's first name. If Freddy Boldt, the stage manager, had ever written a book about rubes it would have included practically the entire population of the habitable globe except Lou and W. Ransome Lord, the owner of the show, and of course Freddy himself and his chorus.

Freddy ought to know the world if anybody did. Hadn't he danced his way up from a chorus man right there at the Globe to a position which the title of stage manager hardly did justice to? As Freddy would explain to you, you could see for yourself that

a man who acted as producer for all the No. 2 companies, cutting the production down to fit the smaller stages and sharpening its points for benighted minds out in the bush, a man who composed the dances and dressed the songs for the productions of the Globe itself—well, stage manager didn't mean what he was at all. But the boss was queer about some things, and Freddy wasn't going to quarrel with him. Although we all knew that if he chose . . .

Freddy, as I think I said, knew the world. He knew all about business men who sat at mahogany desks and gave curt orders that such and such rivals should be "crushed"; who unhooked the telephone receiver and relentlessly ordered whoever answered the call—presumably the operator—to sell XYZ off three points, and thereby created panics in Wall Street and closed the Stock Exchange. He knew about politicians—rude, two-fisted men sometimes, who were called grafters, but had hearts of gold; sometimes "reformers" in eyeglasses, who were found to have pasts and were obliged to give up ambition and let the great reform bill perish without their vote, in order to shield the reputation of a woman. He knew that artists always wore velvet caps and corduroy trousers and went about with a three-legged easel under one arm and a model under the other, and that they had to make love to the model in order to induce her to pose for them; that

men who wore riding breeches and spoke with an English accent were almost invariably seducers and home-wreckers, and that you could tell a farmer when you saw him by the fact that he wore chin-whiskers and chewed a straw. Millionaires, Freddy was well aware, were always upon the point of disinheriting their only sons for failure to comply with their eccentric matrimonial requirements, but they could, as a rule, be prevented from carrying out this unpleasant intention by dressing somebody up in somebody else's clothes, or by inducing some naughty grisette—a grisette always wore a bright red dress—to chuck them under the chin just as their wives were coming in the door. Well, it took all sorts to make a world, and the theatrical world, especially. If people of that sort didn't exist where could the musical comedy plots come from?

Not that there was anything sacred about a plot to Freddy Boldt. Give him enough changes of costume for his chorus, plenty of electricity, and three good tunes, and he'd keep the show going for as long as necessary.

He was justly proud of his chorus. It was a famous institution—and knew it. There wasn't one of the twenty-four girls—pony, medium or show-girl—who hadn't her personal following in the house. They were

seasoned veterans all, young in years, many of them, but old in experience. Freddy had trained them all himself, and, like Sherman's army marching to the sea, they were impervious to surprise or to disaster, perfectly capable, when cut off from their base of supplies by the total disappearance of the plot, of going ahead and, as it were, living off the country.

That being the nature and quality of the Globe, you will understand what it means when I say that the appearance of the new wardrobe mistress caused a shock of undisguisable astonishment to the entire staff and chorus. The principals at the Globe were, as a rule, incapable of wondering about anything, except how certain other principals managed to hold their jobs. But everybody else, after one look into the little cubbyhole where the sewing-machine was, positively jumped and then withdrew to join some little group that had already looked, and discuss the portent in incredulous whispers.

What they saw was a nice, white-haired old lady, with a fine, deep lined, square old face and iron-bowed spectacles and big, competent, motherly hands. She belonged in an illustrated edition of the works of James Whitcomb Riley, and the mere thought of how she would look mending a rent in some rag of arsenic-green chiffon that had the effrontery to call itself a

dress, or hooking a half-clad, disreputable-looking pony up the back, was enough to make you catch your breath.

Freddy Boldt had all the information there was concerning her. She had been wished on them, he said, by the boss himself, that morning, after the previous incumbent had appeared, suffering from her chronic complaint—a complication of cocaine and alcohol. He had sent the new one around to the theater just previous to his departure for the Coast, with a note to Freddy, telling him to instruct her in her duties. So there was nothing further to be got out of W. Ransome Lord, even if any one had felt free to approach him on the subject, which as a matter of fact no one would, unless perhaps Lou Heminway, who was known to fear neither God nor man.

Freddy had talked with her and learned that her name was Keziah Strong and that she came from East Weston, Massachusetts. According to Freddy, she used a dialect which, judged by his description of it, might have come straight out of the pages of *Samanthy Allen*. And there arose a warm argument concerning its good faith; one party holding that the old lady and her dialect were both *bona fide*, and the other that they were in the presence of a frame-up—a cunning attempt on the part of the boss to string them.

Like most oracles, Freddy was non-committal. But,

in his heart, he inclined to the latter party. She was too good to be true. She had made a trip to Boston once, she told him, but had never been to New York in her life and she had never visited the theater. She confided to Freddy that she had once thought of going to see a performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—secretly had rather wanted to—but had refrained on account of her boy Newton, who was, at that period, just at the growing age. If Freddy was a parent himself he would understand that. He came away from the interview gasping. One finishing touch had settled him.

"She calls the boss Willy," he told the electrician. "Now, what do you know about that!"

Well, they wondered their fill about her and then gave her up and took her for granted, just as one takes for granted other stubbornly persistent miracles, like sunrise and the success of certain shows and the ability of Joe Deland, composer-in-ordinary to the Globe, to go on thinking up new tunes, always sloppier, sappier and more inevitably whistleable than those he had thought of before.

Nine days is as long as you can wonder about anything, and at the end of that time the new theme of speculation down under the stage of the Globe was whether Hazel Dering, one of the brunette mediums, was going to fall for Cocktail Johnny. Or, to put it as some of her more uncharitable sisters in the chorus

did, whether Cocktail Johnny was going to fall for her.

I am sorry to say that I can not present Miss Hazel Dering as an object for unqualified approbation. She was not a prime favorite with Globe audiences, who, as a rule, liked their chorus girls to have plump legs and round eyes and a eupeptic air of good humor and high spirits. Hazel was so slender that nothing but the most perfect roundness of limb kept her from looking scrawny. She had black hair and green eyes and, in the main, a languid manner that flashed up now and then in a positively breath-taking way. She had perhaps a rather remarkable talent as a dancer, but in the ordinary jiggings and prancings of the chorus evolutions, it did not show. Altogether, there was something a little exotic about her which brought to the knowingness of Globe audiences a touch of misgiving.

Nor was her popularity any greater among her associates back of the stage. She gave no handle for an active dislike, but she kept her own counsel in a very "cagey" way. She seemed very little interested in any one else's affairs. She treated the chorus men like dirt—which broadly speaking is what they were—walking around them, when they stood in her path, with an unseeing eye which incited them and their friends among the girls to subdued explosions of wrath.

With the other girls, and especially her mates in the No. 6 dressing-room, she was not what you would call unfriendly. She would sit on a trunk and swing her thin legs and contribute languid and somewhat cynical fragments to the conversation that was going round. But even here she was felt to be rather up-stage and superior. Apparently she never was in love with anybody. Or, if she was, she kept it dark—a proceeding which to the normally-minded chorus girl looked distinctly suspicious.

Altogether, if she had the deliberate purpose of distinguishing herself from all the rest, of coming to be a person who would be thought of all by herself rather than as one of a group of others, she succeeded admirably.

The consequence was that when Cocktail Johnny began coming every night and sitting in the front row, when he pointed his attentions by getting introduced to Hazel at Sammy's, one night after the show, when he took to sending monstrous bunches of violets for her around to the stage door, speculation upon a number of angles of the affair grew rife.

Cocktail Johnny was the disrespectful manner of designating one John Sebold, Junior, the original John Sebold being a wealthy manufacturer of saws and quite as sharp and hard and rasping as any of the well-known objects of his manufacture. Having had a

penurious and unlovely youth of his own, his notion of compensatory justice had been to let Johnny run loose.

Really it is hard to see what else there was for a busy man to do, after three highly expensive private schools had declined to be responsible for the boy any longer. He couldn't go to college, it was absurd to expect him to go to work, and the only alternative to sewing him up in a sack and drowning him seemed to be to grease his ways with an ample allowance and, as it were, let him slide. The amplitude of the allowance was perhaps debatable. But Johnny found it easier to graft his regular monthly deficit from a credulous and adoring mother than to take the budget into committee with the old man.

And then Johnny was not without a touch of his father's thrift. At least he had a notion of making his money go as far as possible. No admiring Gibbon will ever chronicle his orgies into imperishable history. Many a man in high boots and a fur overcoat, who has ridden into town with a trainload of cattle, has scattered more of the commodity known as kale seed about the brightly lighted district, in one night than Cocktail Johnny parted with in a month. If you were on confidential terms with a person like Lou Heminway you might get the impression that the gilding on Cocktail Johnny was laid on very thin. But a bright

red automobile, a bright red supper party now and then at one of the louder restaurants, and a sort of a knack for providing avid reporters with feature stories that would make the front page, supplied him with an aureole of fame which was, to him at least, entirely satisfactory.

The consensus of opinion in No. 6—arrived at after Hazel had gone home one night—was that, as an ornamental trifle for the frivolous, Johnny might do very well. But, approached seriously, as a good thing, he would assay very little to the ton. Distinctly not enough to be worth a hard-working girl's trouble to smelt.

What puzzled them about Hazel was that she was not frivolous at all. She never, so far as they knew, went out for a good time with anybody. She must be too wise to suppose that anything more solidly advantageous than a good time could be had out of Johnny. Yet she was playing her hand, as far as they could see, exactly as though she thought there could—stringing him along, stalling him off, working the Sunday-school act. Why, the night he met her at Sammy's she had declined the mixture of champagne, stout and maraschino, which Johnny wanted to buy, in favor of a simple glass of light beer, and explained that the doctor made her drink that every night in the hope of fattening her up. Also, she had positively refused

to be taken home, or anywhere else, in the bright red automobile. In certain circumstances it would all have been very proper. But as a play for Johnny it was downright ridiculous, and Hazel ought to be smart enough to know it.

Freddy Boldt was puzzled about her, too—a state of mind unusual with him, and correspondingly distressing. He didn't admire Hazel exactly. His taste in women was that of the Globe audiences, which is, of course, why he managed so successfully to give those audiences what they wanted. His notion of a real girl was some one plump and jolly, with lots of prance and lots of pep. He had been on the point two or three times of dismissing Hazel for the somewhat contemptuous languor with which she executed the chorus maneuvers, only he couldn't quite bring himself to do it. She was a disconcerting sort of girl. She had a blank way of looking at him out of her green eyes that disquieted him—made his face flush and his throat turn rather dry. It was a look that troubled his memory, too, after she had turned it away from him, and it reduced him, eventually, to a sort of frenzy of exasperation with her. There was no satisfaction in bawling her out in rehearsal. She neither cried nor tried to get fresh with him in any tangible way. Just looked at him again, and then went ahead and seemed to try to carry out his instruc-

tions, but left him feeling always that the victory was somehow with her.

So he shifted from severity to a sort of ferocious friendliness, but didn't go very far with it. She never resisted a rough hug, never pulled any of this unhand-me-sir stuff, but there was a cool indifference about her that chilled him to the bones. Once, when he meant to kiss her, gripped her bare shoulders and pulled her up to him, the blank look in her green eyes flared up suddenly in a way that made the edges of his soul shrivel like the white of a fried egg. He went through with it and kissed her, but he never tried it again.

What worried Freddy the most was her sudden making up to the new wardrobe mistress.

As the days went by the conviction had grown in the stage manager's mind that the new wardrobe mistress was phoney. Not so far as the performance of her duties was concerned. They had never had any one at the Globe who was in her class at all. Gradually, under her ministrations, the costumes, which at the end of a hundred and fifty nights of wear and neglect had become almost too shabby for the patrons of the Globe, began to freshen and bloom again. And if the immaculateness of their white serge suits could possibly have made the chorus men look like the naval officers they were supposed, in the second act, to be, the illusion would have been complete. She worked

fast and she worked tirelessly, and though Freddy Boldt had told her that the girls were supposed to take care of their own tights and stockings, the discovery was soon made that if a girl perched herself on the high stool opposite the sewing-machine, borrowed a needleful of thread and made a bluff at going to work at her mending, grandma was certain to take compassion on her clumsiness and do the job herself in no time at all. But she asked no questions, she never grumbled, she never assured Freddy that if she were absent for a day the show would have to close.

And for these and some other reasons Freddy found it wholly impossible to believe in her. Her casual way of speaking of the Olympian who owned the production as Willy Lord troubled his imagination exceedingly. A person must be very deep indeed to appear as simple as all that. But what secret depths was she exploring? What was her game? And what did that young devil of a Hazel mean by making up to her like that—spending all her spare time in the wardrobe room? When one of the other girls told him that the two had set up housekeeping together in a tiny flat on the North Side, Freddy nearly exploded.

The truth was that at the beginning Hazel Dering's notion of old Keziah Strong had been much the same as Freddy's own. Nobody in the world could be as

innocent as that old lady seemed. The thing that took her into the wardrobe room one night was nothing deeper than a rather incredulous curiosity. It was late in the second act when the show-girls were being guests at the hotel and the ponies and chorus men had a dance to the refrain of *The Pumpkin-vine Rag,* a hit that was always safe for half a dozen encores. All the other mediums but two were busy dressing as Chianti Girls and, as her own last change only involved taking off of a few more clothes, there was nothing for Hazel to do, so she picked up Johnny's latest bunch of violets and dropped in on Keziah.

The wardrobe mistress was sitting with her back to her as she came in, and with a flicker of mischief across her face she stole up close and thrust the heavy odorous mass of the violets into Keziah's face.

The act might pass for a little manifestation of friendliness, you see, but it was sure to be surprising, and there is nothing like a surprise for revealing momentarily the true colors of a masquerader. Hazel wouldn't have been astonished to hear the nice old lady demand to know what the hell she thought she was doing.

But what Keziah did cry out was, "Sakes alive!" And then, with a glance up at Hazel, she caught up the great purple and green mass, which the medium's hand

relinquished disdainfully enough, pressed it to her face again and drew in two or three long breaths of the fragrance of it.

Hazel dropped into a chair, stretched out her long, slim, silk-clad legs, hooked her French heels into the lower round of the high stool and yawned.

"My!" said Keziah. "That smell does take me straight back home. The medder lot is just blue with them the first week in June." She took a last sniff and held them out to Hazel. Hazel didn't seem anxious to be incumbered with them, so Keziah laid them down gently on the extension to her sewing-machine.

"I didn't know that the violets you picked had any smell," said Hazel. "Only the kind you buy at the florist's."

"That's queer, too," said Keziah. "I never thought of their raising a common pasture flower like violets at a greenhouse. But I might have know'd it. I'd plumb forgot it was January, just for the minute."

"January is right," said Hazel. "That bunch must have reduced Johnny about ten bucks."

Keziah thought she knew how much a buck was, but this statement staggered her. "You don't ever mean ten dollars!" she exclaimed.

But Hazel assured her she did, and provided her with a number of other synonyms not in the Thesauras.

"It seems downright sinful," mused the wardrobe mistress. But her face softened into a smile and she added, "But I s'pose just now, to that young man, money don't matter. Nothing he can get seems good enough. Why, I can remember" . . .

But the memory itself superseded the power to tell about it for a minute, and Hazel, with an answering smile of a rather different quality, spoke.

"You said something then," she said philosophically. "'Just now' is right."

"No, it don't last, that feeling don't," said Keziah. "And perhaps it's just as well." And she added, with another glance at the violets: "I hope he can afford it."

Hazel laughed. "You don't have to worry about him," she said. "His elastic's never been stretched very bad yet. Johnny's wad is always wrapped up good and tight."

"Well," said Keziah, "thrift ain't a bad quality, afterward. I s'pose," she went on, "you're calc'latin' to get married pretty soon?"

She looked around placidly into the girl's face as she said it.

Hazel didn't move. The long slim legs were still stretched out indolently in front of her, the heels hooked into the round of the stool, her hands clasped behind her head, supporting it. But, for just a minute, the lazy relaxed body might have been changed to

marble, so rigid did it look. Her eyes that met Keziah's had gone blank.

It was a little trick of Hazel's, really, that cold unfocused stare, and never, until now, had it failed to work. She had been just a child when she discovered it—discovered that something about her green, wide-set eyes, and the shape of her face, worried people when she looked at them like that—made them want to look away and be unable to—frightened them a little sometimes. It was a valuable discovery, and she had never abused it, never told any one that she knew how she did it. Her mirror was all that knew how carefully worked up an effect it was.

But this time it missed fire completely. Keziah beamed at her through her big iron-bowed spectacles and went on with her sewing.

Slowly Hazel took down her legs, pulled herself back into the chair, leaned forward, her elbow on the arm of it, her chin in her hand and searched the placid, motherly old face of the wardrobe mistress. How in the world could the innocent old party she seemed to be have laid her finger like that upon the very kernel of the girl's secret design? Because that is what she had done.

Hazel was calculating the feasibility of no less a feat than marrying little Johnny Sebold. Anybody else there at the Globe would have laughed at the idea.

Johnny would laugh at it himself. And Hazel by no means underrated the difficulties of the campaign. She approached it precisely as an ambitious young salesman would approach the possibility of landing a big contract. If she played it skilfully enough, made no mistakes, if the luck broke right, it just might be managed.

It must be admitted that no moral repugnance was responsible for Hazel's rejection, in advance, of Cocktail Johnny's counter-proposition. Her virtue was precisely on a par with the honesty of the business man who knows it is the best policy. What she would get if she proved compliant to Johnny's wishes, was a few expensive suppers, a few rides in the bright red automobile, a few days—or weeks—as the case might be, of luxury which would make her twenty dollars a week ménage all the harder to go back to. And what she would have left after the wine had been drunk and the flowers faded, would be some jewelry of the sort that sparkles well in a restaurant, but looks under the pawnbroker's eye-glass like about thirty dollars. And it wasn't good enough.

A marriage, Hazel knew—a marriage with Cocktail Johnny—would hardly be more permanent than the arrangement he had in mind. But the position it would leave her in when it was over was vastly different. Why, the publicity alone would be worth all the effort

of the campaign, even if Johnny's father never came across at all.

The trouble with the plan, the thing that made it seem to Hazel's dispassionate calculation almost hopeless from the first, was that it could not be executed on a bare stage. It needed a setting which Hazel's solitary existence in a cheap boarding-house didn't provide her with. Indeed, if she had been in honest reality all she meant to pretend to be, the game would have been all too likely to go Johnny's way rather than hers. Where could she see him except in his automobile or across one of Sammy's private tables or somewhere else where he might take her? Who was there that she could fall back on for protection when Johnny's ardors required the application of the soft-pedal? No, she couldn't play it alone. She might as well make up her mind to that.

So you will understand that there was a good deal for the girl to think about in the long silence that followed Keziah's remark that she supposed Hazel was calculating to get married pretty soon. Her slim fingers pressed hard into her cheek, her brows drew together in a thoughtful frown. She caught her breath as if to speak, but checked the impulse and drew back. Should she try it? What was behind that grave, kindly old face? From it her eyes fell upon the hands—those big, motherly, skilful hands. Absurdly enough,

the thought came to the girl that it would feel good to have those hands touch her—to relax, for the space of a breath or two, in the firm strong hold of them.

The idea was gone again almost before she could smile at it. Was she getting loony? No. Not so you would notice it. She leaned back in the chair, but did not resume her old attitude. The slim legs bent decorously to the floor, the tunic was hitched down as far over her thighs as it would go. The arms rested at her side and the hands were folded in her lap. She had taken her decision. She was going to try to play the game.

It was a long, rather shaky sigh that made the wardrobe mistress look up again. And what she saw was a relaxed, tired-looking girl with a thoughtful face.

"I don't know," said Hazel, "whether I'm going to get married at all or not." Then with a little catch in her throat she added: "Oh, but I wish't I did!"

With due regard for her make-up, she pressed her hands to her eyes. But if she had any idea that the old wardrobe mistress herself would go loony now, come over to her with caresses and endearments and comfortably want to be told all about it, it was because Hazel had, as yet, a very inadequate conception of the sort of people who came from East Weston, Massachusetts.

Keziah went on with her sewing. She did indeed look up in a friendly way enough.

"Well," she said, " a husband lasts a long time and it ain't a bad idea for a girl to be sure she knows what she's getting. If she ain't just sure what she thinks about him . . ."

Naturally enough this struck Hazel as funny. But the scene acted all right, the laugh mixing up with a sob in quite a hysterical way.

"I know what I think about him, all right," she said. Which was entirely true. Hazel's confidential opinion of little Johnny Sebold was something I would not even attempt to paraphrase.

Keziah finished stitching a seam before she looked up again.

"Well," she said, "I guess there ain't much doubt what he thinks of you. So I suppose what you're thinking about is going on here and getting to be a famous actress."

For just a second Hazel went rigid again. Could you beat it, the way the old lady went on ringing the bell that way at every shot? That was precisely what Hazel was thinking about. The wife of Johnny Sebold would be notorious enough, for a few days anyway, to be sure of a chance. And a chance, Hazel was convinced, was all she needed. But the next minute she saw what Keziah meant.

"But I wouldn't think about that, if I was you," the old lady went on. "It's probably all right to be a

great actress and have your picture in the paper. But it ain't like having a good home and somebody that loves you to take care of you."

Hazel choked and the tears came into her eyes. It was lucky for her that the emotions of extreme mirth and a much deeper feeling look so much alike. The good home and the loving care Keziah was talking about were to come from Johnny Sebold! But, somehow, the placid dignity of the old lady sobered her, and she wasn't acting a bit when she said, a moment later, rather harshly:

"I don't know anything about a home. I never had one. Nor any one to care about me, either."

"And a peaked, pale-complected, thin little thing like you, too," said Keziah, "with no more strength than a rabbit. I wish't I'd a had the care of you."

"That goes—double," said the girl.

She ought to have broken down and cried a little just then, and, despite her make-up, she would have done it if the Chianti girls had not begun coming in to get hooked up the back. Hazel got up to go. Her eyes fell on the bunch of violets. She hesitated, picked them up and held them out to Keziah.

"Want 'em?" she asked rather harshly, and she pushed them into the old lady's reluctant hand. "Aw, take 'em. On the level. Keep them to remember the —medder lot by." And she crowded past one of the

Chianti girls into the passage. But she stopped outside—a puzzled, rather wry smile on her face as if what she had just done or the feeling that accompanied it, had taken her by surprise. She stood there for the better part of a minute. Then she shrugged her white shoulders and gave a short laugh.

"Hell!" she observed to herself. "Maybe I can't pull this *Old Homestead* stuff myself!"

She pulled open the door of the No. 6 dressing-room, shut it again rather quickly behind her, leaned back against it and stood for a moment listening to the chatter that ran around before the mirrors.

"Say," she said presently, "do you see that sign?" and she indicated the dingy placard with a gesture that had a certain insolent defiance about it. "Well, that goes for me," she concluded. "Grandma's right next door and it don't take a very loud yelp for her to hear."

What the sign said was that profane or indecent language was strictly forbidden.

The rest of No. 6 dressing-room was very much amused.

"I ain't kiddin' neither," said Hazel.

And that made it all the funnier.

The game worked so smoothly after that that Hazel was almost frightened about it. It was the very next

"See that sign? Well that goes for me."

day when she dropped into the wardrobe room that Keziah, of her own accord, mentioned the subject of boarding-houses. Keziah had never boarded out in her life before she came to Chicago, and though in her friendly uncomplaining way she expressed a good deal of sympathy for her harassed landlady and credited her with doing the best she could, it was plain she hated the place down to the fibers of her soul.

Hazel expressed a similar sentiment, hesitated a second, and then took the plunge.

"Say!" she exclaimed a little breathlessly. "What's the matter with us hooking up for a while—you and me? We could find a little mutt of an apartment somewhere that we wouldn't have to pay more than thirty-five a month for. We could stand that, I guess. A straight fifty-fifty proposition and wrestle up the eats ourselves."

The details of the plan needed a little more explaining before Keziah quite took them in. But her delight in it when she did understand was almost pathetic.

They went flat hunting the next afternoon and, as Hazel was not very particular, and as everything that Keziah saw looked to her like a miracle of modernity and convenience, they soon found a place that would do, and the bargain was struck. They had been gloating over their new acquisition for about ten minutes,

Hazel assuring herself in a somewhat puzzled way that her share of the enthusiasm was merely histrionic, when she thought of something that made her jump.

"My gaw . . . my gracious!" she said. "We're a pair of simps, all right. We ain't got anything to live on—beds and tables and things."

Keziah didn't seem perturbed. "I know we ain't," she assented placidly. "But I brought along some things with me, and the rest I sold before I left East Weston. But I guess the money's just as good here as it is there."

Hazel digested this proposition a minute in silence.

"Not on your life," she said at last. "There's no let George do it about this proposition. This is straight fifty-fifty. I can make the ante thirty-five. I haven't got it, but I know where I can raise it. And if you can see that, I guess we'll get along all right. We can buy anything else we need, on time."

Keziah was, of course, a little puzzled over this speech—required quite an extensive glossary before she fully understood it. But her bewilderment over it was nothing to Hazel's.

All the way to the pawnbroker's with her one good ring, which she had raised money on so often as to regard rather as negotiable collateral than as a mere ornament, and all the way back, she wondered why she had said it—why she hadn't allowed the old lady

to go ahead and furnish the flat all by herself, if she liked. She arrived at last at the not very plausible explanation that it had been just a part of the game of stringing Keziah—of keeping up, in other words, the illusion. The old lady must have no misgivings that she was being used merely to furnish the stage setting in the play Hazel meant to make for Cocktail Johnny.

That explanation had to do duty a good many times during the next week, while they tramped the streets by day looking for bargains, discussed ways and means in the wardrobe room at night, and finally, after settling their scanty belongings in the little flat, began the process which Hazel had described as "wrestling up the eats" for themselves. Hazel's culinary lore was limited to the toasting of marshmallows on a hatpin. The old lady was as much at home over a stove as over a sewing-machine, and her tireless energy and her mothering instincts led her to take all the work of the establishment on her own shoulders as a matter of course.

But Hazel, doggedly reiterating her "fifty-fifty," insisted on getting up when Keziah did and trying to do her half of the work. If any one had accused her of developing a real interest in, to say nothing of an affection for, the little place they had begun to speak of as home, she would vigorously have disclaimed such

feelings. It was hard to do, of course. She was getting tired—so dog tired that it was no wonder if once in a while she caught herself wishing little Johnny Sebold had never come near enough to tempt her into making a cast for him; wishing she had nothing to do outside her job at the Globe but stay around the flat and let old Keziah teach her to cook.

She did have something else to do though—something that required good judgment and a nice hand and well-balanced nerves. And that was to keep Johnny fluttering about at just the right distance until she should have her web all woven for him. Because you couldn't expect Johnny, of his own accord, to wait patiently about, like Mary's lamb, until she was ready. Really, he wanted pretty skilful handling. He was not what you might call a big game hunter. His ambitions had never taken him very high, and it must be owned he was used to facile conquests. And though a little resistance might pique his interest, too much would drive him away altogether.

So, for what seemed to her an interminable period of days, she played him as cautiously as a skilled angler does a fish—giving him a little more line when he got restless, pulling him in sharply when he went too far, and managing to keep him, on the whole, pretty much where she wanted him. One thing that went to Johnny's heart was that she wouldn't let him spend

much money on her. They lunched or dined together almost every day, but always at the cheaper and quieter restaurants, and she never let him buy any wine. On fine afternoons, when there was no matinée, she went riding with him in his red car, looking so pretty, with the bright fugitive color in her cheeks and her red fine lips, so deliciously slender, muffled up in her big pony coat, that Johnny could hardly keep his hands on the wheel. She never let him know what to expect of her. For always, somehow, just when he was getting disgusted with the fruitlessness of the game, some sudden, unsought caress of hers would bring him back.

And then at last, when he was about persuaded that she meant things to go on like this between them, without any substantial change, she told him suddenly that he might bring her home one night after the show.

Johnny couldn't have told how they had ever got to talking about marriage at all. He wouldn't, certainly, have begun upon that theme. And yet he couldn't remember that Hazel had ever mentioned it herself, except as an impossibility. In that light, though, she must have spoken of it pretty often. "Of course he couldn't marry her," that seemed to be what she was saying, "so why did he insist on playing around? It couldn't come to anything, really."

But constant dropping will wear away a stone, and the constant iteration of an idea was slowly drilling

in to that highly inaccessible object, Johnny Sebold's brain. At any rate, his manner toward her, as he followed her about the little flat and was shown its small homely wonders—the way he kissed her, for instance, out in the pantry, when they were wrestling with a stubborn ice-box door that had some beer behind it—his manner of taking that kiss, I say, was very different from what it had been two weeks before, when he had kissed her across the table in a *cabinet particulier* at Sammy's.

Oh, it was working. There couldn't be a doubt of it. The living-room, with its potted geraniums in the window and a lot of Keziah's queer old treasures stuck about—a big family Bible and a plush album, the plain little table with the white cloth over it where they had sat down for the sandwiches that went with the beer—the whole look of the place spelled out Home and Haven and Security. And then Keziah herself. Given *carte blanche* to make any one to order for her purposes, Hazel couldn't have done so well as that. She might look phoney to Freddy Boldt in the wardrobe room at the theater, but here at home . . . Well, she certainly looked good to Hazel.

The girl had taken pains to dress slowly enough after the show, so that the wardrobe mistress should have time to get home first. And the way she had greeted them when they came in—just with that placid

motherly smile of hers and a word or two in her funny old rube talk to Johnny, and then had guessed she'd say good night, and disappeared into her little bedroom down the hall. . . . Why, it had brought, inexplicably, a lump into Hazel's throat.

And it had got Johnny. There could be no doubt of that. Yes, it had got him.

He sat beside her on the couch for a while after they had finished the sandwiches and beer—the couch whose function as the place where Hazel slept was masked by a cotton blanket in broad red and blue stripes—and at last, when she told him it was late, got up to go. It wasn't until she had gone with him as far as the outer door that he hesitated and stopped and then came in again.

"S-say," he began, choked, flushed and began again. "L-look here, Hazel . . ."

When he had gone the girl flung herself down on the couch and for half an hour she lay there, staring at the ceiling with dry bright eyes, her fists clenched tightly at her sides, her breast heaving with long-drawn artificially-regular breaths.

Was it triumph? Yes, of course it was. Hadn't the game gone exactly as she had planned it from the first? And hadn't that little fool come straight to the landing net at last, without a struggle? She had refused him, to be sure—at least had insisted that he

go away and think it over—make sure he really meant it before he asked her again. But that was all in the game. It had been done on the impulse of the moment, to guard against a possible reaction, she told herself, in Johnny's feelings. If she had grabbed him the first chance she got, he might wake up the next morning feeling that he had been stung. There was no danger of that now. He'd come back all right. There'd be a run down to Crown Point in the red automobile—Crown Point being over the State Line, where the formalities about a license were simple—a ten minutes' session in the justice shop, and Hazel would be Mrs. John Sebold, Junior.

The exact order of events after that wasn't so clear and didn't in the least matter. There would be suppers and flowers and reporters, luxurious suites in hotels, fearful rows with Johnny's old man, and, eventually, fearful rows with Johnny. There would be snapshots of her in the paper, interviews, denials. But the one thing that emerged clearly at the end of it all—the thing she couldn't miss if she kept her head—would be the chance to make good; the opportunity to come before an audience all by herself and see what she could do to them. Of course if she hadn't the goods, the notoriety wouldn't help—would simply give her the farther to fall. But Hazel wasn't afraid. If

she were nothing but a glass crash after all, the sooner she found it out the better.

But it wasn't triumph she felt as she lay there any more than it had been common-sense prudence that had sent Johnny away without a final answer that night. It was now, just as it had been then, a terrifying, inexplicable revulsion of feeling. She was sick of the game—sick of Johnny—sick of the whole rotten business. Oh, she wasn't going to play the fool and chuck the whole thing when she'd just got it in her hands. But, God, how she wanted to!

It was with a half hysterical little laugh that she greeted Keziah when the old lady, in a big cotton flannel dressing-gown, came into the sitting-room to see why Hazel didn't go to bed. Whatever emotional crisis she was able to guess at in the flushed face and the bright eyes and the tightly clenched hands, she made no comment on it, just began gathering up the remains of the little supper that still littered the table, and guessed Hazel had better take off her clothes and go to bed.

The girl didn't answer, but sat up on the couch and, for a minute or two, watched the deft capable hands that were setting the table to rights. She must be precious old, old Keziah. Didn't she ever get sick of life, sick of her job? Apparently not.

"I don't suppose," the girl said at last, aloud but half to herself, "I don't suppose you ever in all your life came anywhere near blowing up and making a silly sickening fool of yourself."

Keziah went on folding the table-cloth.

"Do you mean bein' a fool," she asked, "or bein' what some folks would call a fool? Because I have been that often enough. And I ain't never been sorry."

"But suppose," the girl went on after another silence; "suppose you got a chance—the chance of your life, something you'd been waiting for, playing the whole game for—would you chuck it, just because there happened to be something about it you didn't like; something that made you—sick?"

The table-cloth was folded now and laid away. In words Keziah made no answer to the girl's question at all. But after another look at her she came over and sat down on the edge of the couch and took Hazel's shoulders in her big hands. It was the first thing that could be called a caress that had passed between them. And, it appeared, there was a sort of magic in it, for the slim taut-drawn body turned limp and the dry hard eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Put your head down here," said Keziah, "and cry your fill."

And it was a good while after that before she said

anything more to the point. But when the cry was finished, and the slim body, quite limp except for the hand that held on to Keziah, lay back on the couch again, getting its breath rather catchily to be sure, but otherwise quiet—it wasn't till then that Keziah spoke.

"I have had to work pretty hard," she said, "most of my life. I didn't trouble about that because I reckoned it was what we was born to—most of us, anyway. And I ain't never been rich, never c'd afford a grand pianny nor an autymobile. But there's one thing I've always calc'lated I could afford. That was to do the things I wanted to do, the way I wanted to do them, tend to my own business and be beholden to nobody. I expect it's been a sort of extravagance," she concluded, "but I ain't never thought I had to econymize that way. I'm still alive and hearty and I ain't had to swallow anything that made me sick. And as for bein' a fool . . ."

The girl sat up with a shaky laugh.

"Well, we'll be a pair of them, then," she said. "You toddle back to bed. I'm going to write a note."

. . . . . .

W. Ransome Lord, he whom Keziah called Willy, came back from the Coast and turned up at the theater one night just as the performance was about to begin. Freddy Boldt greeted him cheerfully, assured him that everything was going first-rate, and then, on the point

of going rather further into details, suddenly changed his mind and urged the boss to go around and see the show through from the front, which W. Ransome Lord agreed to do.

On the whole, Freddy was pretty well pleased with himself. He was a wise little guy all right, who could see through something less perspicuous than a ladder. Hadn't he called the turn on old Keziah Strong, whom "Willy" had sent around to be wardrobe mistress just before he left for the Coast? Hadn't he detected the inner meaning of the intimacy between her and Hazel Dering? He had had rather a narrow escape with Hazel, in truth. What if he had canned her, as he had meant to do, before he really caught on to the way things were going? What if (and this would have been worse; indeed, the thought of it made a sort of shiver go up his back), what if he had really insisted on making love to her? Gee! But he had got wise in time.

He had his first surmise of how the land lay from watching Hazel there in the wardrobe room. It had been strengthened from day to day by witnessing the studious caution with which the girl stood off the advances of Johnny Sebold. But he might never really have got next if it hadn't been for Johnny himself.

He had encountered Johnny at Sammy's one night—Johnny very drunk, very maudlin, weeping all by him-

self into a glass of light beer. He had been inclined at first to believe the story Johnny told him to be the mere figment of a drunken imagination, because it didn't seem possible that it could be sober fact. Johnny had fallen in love with Hazel Dering, he said, to such a point that he had actually made her a straight proposition—asked her, if you please, to marry him. *And Hazel had refused.*

Freddy Boldt might well be incredulous. Freddy certainly knew the world if any one did, and he had never heard of a thing like that happening before. But Cocktail Johnny had documentary evidence. He pulled out of his pocket a crumpled, damp little note and gave it to Freddy Boldt to read. Yes, there it was in so many words. She couldn't marry him, wouldn't marry him. Never wanted to see him again.

And at that Freddy saw the light. The boss himself! Of course. That accounted for Keziah, accounted for Hazel, accounted for everything. He got out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration off a very damp forehead. Well, he had had a rather narrow escape! But it was all right now. In place of getting in bad with the boss, he was in a position to make a hit. It was for this verdict that he waited after the show.

"You've got a good eye, old chap," the boss said cheerfully, as he dropped into Freddy's dressing-room,

"picking that Hazel What's-her-name for Blue Bell. She certainly goes big. But how did you ever happen to think of her? She always looked like a lemon to me in the chorus.

"And by the way," he went on, not noticing the utterly blank look that had come into the stage manager's face, "by the way, how does old Keziah Strong get on as wardrobe mistress?"

"Aw—all right," said Freddy.

"I must go around and say 'how'dy do' to her," the boss went on. "It was a sort of an experiment, picking her up. She used to sew out for a living in the town I came from. I've known her ever since I can remember. She must have saved me many a licking at one time or another. I happened to run across her in the station just as I was going to take the train, so I sent her around. Guess I'll go and see her now."

Freddy began wiping the grease-paint off with a towel. For some minutes after the door had closed behind the boss he remained absolutely speechless. But at last he laid down the towel, drew in a long breath and gazed at his own astonished countenance in the mirror.

"Now, what do you know about that!" said Freddy.

THE SPRING OF THE YEAR

THE GLOBE was a little theater; only you must spell little with a small l to indicate that its size was dictated by grossly material considerations—namely, the dimensions of the old billiard parlor and the bowling alley underneath, that it had used to be—and not by esthetic ones at all. It seated at a decided pinch six hundred seventy-eight persons, and if you were fat and fussy you did better to stay away, because the space between the chair-arms was not calculated for the accommodation of any leviathans, as it were, of the deep. With an eighteen-inch beam, or less, you did very comfortably and were likely to feel that you had got your dollar's worth.

Which brings me to what I meant to say at the beginning: that with only six hundred seventy-eight seats to sell, and the best of them bringing only a dollar, the salary list, even with ten performances a week, was a delicate matter. It would have been very easy for W. Ransome Lord, in an expansive moment, to sign up a cast that would leave him nothing to pay his light bills with. The "Sold Out" sign might be getting

dingy with constant exposure to the elements and Willy Lord poorer all the time.

On the other hand, his patrons were by no means the sort of innocents who would come to his theater unless they believed that there was something to come for. The average audience at the Globe contained perhaps a larger proportion of persons who read the dramatic section of the Sunday papers and pore over the syndicated chatter from New York than any other audience in town. They knew what was what all right. You could take it from them.

So it made, you see, a rather pretty dilemma. The weekly salary of one real first or second magnitude star would require the entire box-office receipts of a Saturday night, and perhaps a matinée thrown in, to pay—a proceeding which spelled RUIN in letters big enough to satisfy the star himself. And if you didn't give them something like that, or something that looked like that, the audience wouldn't come.

But Willy Lord played a system which skilfully evaded both the siren of extravagance and the rocks of economy. It took, on the average, two productions a year to keep the Globe going. And whenever possible he opened a new show in an off season. May was a favorite time with him—just when the big New York productions were beginning to expire with the heat. He nursed this summer show along, if possible,

into November. You will see the advantage of this in a minute.

Willy's plan was to catch his principals either coming or going.

You know the flower stands you pass when you are hurrying to the railway station. They have beautiful bunches of American Beauties, a little too full-blown, and you carry them carefully in order that all the petals shall not be jiggled off before you get them to their destination; or else little buds that haven't bloomed yet at all, and you take a chance.

This was Willy Lord's policy exactly. He had a rather wonderful eye for buds and he didn't care where he saw them as long as they looked good to him. He found little Rags Jansen, for example (her real name was Ragna, but that was too hard to say) in a moving-picture house out in Bakersfield, California, doing a song and dance while they changed reels. And that case was a fair example. The buds worked their heads off for him, and after a season or two, if they turned out as well as they usually did, they flitted away from the Globe, went to New York and got discovered all over again. Willy never paid them over fifty or seventy-five a week, and they and the chorus were pretty nearly the whole show as far as entertaining the audiences went.

But for getting the audiences into the house you

needed a few names. And that was where the timing of his new productions came in. When he viewed the landscape o'er in November or in May he was pretty sure to find here and there a really big name that could be secured at a very marked reduction, indeed. It had to be done tactfully, of course.

If Luttrell Shean, for instance, had suspected that Willy Lord's encounter with him at the club in New York was premeditated; that Willy knew he was broke; that all the big things he had been angling for had passed him by and that Willy had now the presumption to regard him as fair game for his new production, *The Spring of the Year,* in a little second-rate dollar house out in Chicago, this same Luttrell Shean, hard up as he was, poised as he knew himself to be for a glide on the toboggan, would have been insulted within an inch of his life and would proudly have told Willy to go to the devil.

But Willy made their meeting seem the most casual thing in the world. He admitted that he was looking for a headliner in the comedy way. Did Shean happen to know of anybody? Willy wished, with a heartfelt sigh, that his resources ran "to somebody in your class, old chap," but, of course, with a dollar house and only six hundred seventy-eight seats, Shean could see how it was. Yes, Shean could see, and he would try to think of somebody. And while he was thinking

they had lunch together and a few drinks, and Willy listened, without batting an eye, to a tale of enormous prospects that had failed of realization by the merest hair, of duplicity and low commercialism on one side and high-minded devotion to the ideals of his art on the other for an hour or so. By that time the thing was practically settled. There was nothing the comedian wouldn't do for a man he liked, and, by gad, Willy was a good chap. Shean would take the job himself—dashed if he wouldn't! He could have any salary he pleased, as far as announcements to his friends were concerned. As to the amount that came in his envelop every Saturday night, that was a confidential matter.

The manager picked up another bargain on the same trip in the person of Aggie Renfrew. Aggie was English—from the Halls—and was what was left of an ill-judged attempt to make an American vaudeville star out of her by the brute force of advertising. When Willy threw her the life-line of an offer she was so obviously *in extremis* that it was all she could do to act disdainful and take a day to think it over and affect a reluctance about coming to Chicago. Of course there was a project for building a theater for her next year and she was sure to have a show of her own, anyway. But in the meantime—well, yes. She would do it.

She proved to be one of Willy's comparatively rare mistakes. She was a metallic and somewhat battered little Cockney, a very up-stage lady, indeed, who considered America low, Chicago sickeningly vulgar and the Globe a rotten hole. Look at her dressing-room, now! 'Pon her word she had never. . . . But these pork-killing Americans cared nothing for Art. Only for dollars.

The boss finally decided that as far as her Art was concerned, this was true and that though he had got her at a bargain, it was the sort of bargain that the innocent visitor to the wicked city sometimes gets when he purchases a satchel full of perfectly good ten-dollar bills at a greatly reduced price.

Anyhow, she had served her purpose in advertising the new show. So she got her two weeks' notice and departed in a pale blue glare of rage; and little Rags Jansen reigned in her stead.

We feel rather superior about miracles these days. But one happens every now and then, nevertheless. And it was a sure enough miracle that happened now at the Globe, when little Rags Jansen—a nobody from nowhere, stepped into the shoes of the celebrated Aggie Renfrew and without a trick in her box or a shot in her locker, simply wiped up the stage with all the rest of the cast, including the great Luttrell Shean himself.

The miracle was not that she did it—not that the audience, the first night she appeared, just broke up the show whenever she did anything and refused to let things start again until she had done it over at least four times. Indeed it would have been a miracle if they had done anything else.

She couldn't dance very much, it is true, and she could hardly sing at all. And her little imitations were in no way technically remarkable. But she liked doing them so much herself, went into it all so completely in the spirit of a child, she was so vibrant with youth and high spirit, she invited you so irresistibly to come and share the game with her, that, as Freddy Boldt, the stage manager, observed, there was nothing to it. The show's real name was Rags from the night she first appeared in it.

But that, as I said, was not the miracle. The miracle was that back of the footlights, instead of starting up a tinkers' chorus of envy and disparagement—a rap, rap, rapping on their pans, as they used to sing in *Robin Hood,* everybody back there felt about her just as the audiences did. Staff, chorus and principals, from Cissy Blake—the youngest and freshest chorus man, up to and including the great Luttrell Shean, unanimously, collectively and individually, fell in love with her.

All told, it was an exhibition to make the celebrated

lying down together of the lion and the lamb look like a very inferior act indeed. The old Globe hardly knew itself, and that was a fact.

Of course, part of it was because little Rags loved everybody back—loved them, and regarded their superior knowledge and experience with admiring wonder. And, being the successor to Aggie Renfrew, she certainly shone by force of contrast.

Rags, bless her heart, wasn't superior to anybody. She made friends with the chorus girls in a way that was half timid, half adventurous, as if she might have expected a rebuff. She accepted as twenty-four karat truth the statement of the soprano that Dippel had been trying to get her for Grand Opera, but wouldn't pay her a proper salary because she hadn't a European reputation. She listened to Freddy Boldt, the stage manager, with awe while he explained to her at great length, the diversity, the onerousness and the critical importance of all his duties—duties which required—well, practical omniscience to fulfil and which left him not a moment from eleven A. M. to eleven A. M. that he could call his own.

And she watched with wondering, wide eyes, the goings and comings, the airs and the graces that made him so much more like a well-preserved young duke than any real duke that ever lived, of the great Luttrell Shean.

She listened to the stage manager while he explained the importance of his duties.

Considering the fact that girls had been looking at him with just that sort of eyes for the last quarter century or so, you might think that by this time he would have ceased to notice them; that whether one more little girl wondered at him, half fascinated and half afraid, or whether she never saw him at all, never cared particularly whether he was there or somewhere else, would have been a matter of complete indifference to him. You might think that at the end of a string of amatory adventures such as Mr. Shean could boast—though it wasn't true of him, as some people thought, that he had married a new one every two years for the past two decades, to say nothing of the co-respondents in between—but even stating the truth at its lowest possible terms, you might think that in the year of Grace that found him starring at the Globe, it was clearly impossible he should begin once more perennially to bloom again—to wax his mustaches to a sharper point, belt in what it wasn't fair perhaps to call a corset but served the purpose as well, a couple of notches tighter, swing his swagger stick with an extra flourish; begin trying to look sad and cynical and Byronic as he stood in the wings before an audience of one, waiting for his cue to go out on the stage and make an audience of six hundred and seventy-eight rustle with laughter. You might not think it possible that Luttrell Shean—fifty, if he was a

day—having made, as his experienced eye could see plainly enough, a conquest of little Rags, should begin by feeling sorry for her, go on by the old familiar process to feeling sorry for himself, and finally after sentimentalizing for a while about it own up again that at last, and for the first time, he had really fallen in love. But if you do think all this was impossible, you are a long way from doing justice to him. Why, stop and think a minute! If he had not fallen in love with her, do you suppose he would have endured, without protest, her taking the scene away from him, as time after time she did, every night *The Spring of the Year* was played?

This fact, indeed, was the final, incontrovertible proof that at last, after so many matrimonial misadventures that he had actually and literally lost count of them, he now knew that he had found the right one.

Why he was glad, actually glad, that little Rags was such a hit! He didn't mind having one of his best lines—a line he'd written in himself, too, to say to the tenor—perish every night, because the six hundred and seventy-eight besotted individuals out in front were still clamoring to have Rags do her telephone bit again for the fourth time. Let them applaud. Wasn't she his, or going to be? Of course, she was only a raw little thing now—good for the Provinces which didn't

appreciate him, but when he had taught her—well, to be liberal, a tenth part of what he knew about the art of acting, she would be really great and Broadway would be all agape for her.

Well, he'd have a word or two to say to them. Some of those insolent commercial dollar-grabbers around Forty-second Street who had had the effrontery to tell him almost in so many words that he was a has-been, would sing a different tune when he turned up with little Rags under his arm. And it sent a glow down to the deepest roots of his soul—that is, if a root can feel a glow—to think of the fond and loving way in which she would say with a glance around at him, "I shall never take any engagement without my husband." Ah, if he had only known her long ago, even a year ago, he shouldn't have known the disgrace of singing in a dollar house!

What had escaped Mr. Luttrell Shean's eye was the fact that while little Rags wondered and flushed and smiled at him, she was doing all those things, in exactly the same way, at more or less everybody else—everybody who had a place, however humble, in the wonderful new world that she had just found herself projected into—everybody, all the way down to Cissy Blake, the youngest and freshest of the chorus men.

You couldn't wonder at this oversight. One could

no more expect Mr. Shean to be aware of little round-faced, ridiculous Cissy Blake than of an angleworm on the sidewalk.

But Hazel Dering's green eyes were more alert. She and Rags dressed in the same room—a little box of a place that represented what room was left after they got through partitioning off the domain of the property man—and by virtue of a degree of sophistication that it would take at least three reincarnations fully to account for, she acted, good naturedly enough, the part of guide, philosopher and friend, to the innocence of Rags.

"It seems to me," she observed one evening, as they entered the dressing-room, "it seems to me you're kind of careless who you show the glad face to."

Rags was wriggling out of her street frock and a troublesome hook or two had her attention for the moment, so Hazel went on.

"What did you think it was you was smiling at?"

"I think his name is Cissy Blake," said Rags. "Why do you suppose they call him Cissy?"

"Has he a name?" said Hazel, with a blighting air of indifference. "I thought he was a chorus man."

But you wasted irony on Rags.

"What's the matter with him?" she asked. "He smiled at me. Why shouldn't I smile back at him? Do you know anything about him?"

"He is a chorus man, isn't he?" said Hazel. And after a pause, while she investigated the extent of a Jacob's ladder in one of the sheer silk stockings she had taken off, she looked up at Rags and added: "You don't have to know any more about him than that, do you?"

"I don't know," said Rags. "I think he is kind of nice."

It went against Hazel's principles to admit the individuality of any one of the despised breed, but now she said: "He's that round, dumpy, fresh little fat one, isn't he? He's a joke."

"I suppose he might be a good joke, though," said Rags and at that, with a laugh, Hazel slapped her and told her to get along and put her clothes on.

But the hand that gave the slap lingered in a sort of caress, and then took hold in an investigatory squeeze. "Gee, but you're strong, kid," she said. "Where'd you get it?"

It was not until a week or two later that Hazel, with all her alertness, became aware that Luttrell Shean was, as she put it, in again; and that his posings and his preenings and the Byronically interesting look he wore in the wings, had Rags for an object.

The fact that she was so slow about it was due to Shean's method. The notion was that you must get them hooked before you betrayed any personal in-

terest in them. Let them admire you hopelessly from afar, wonder if you were conscious even of their bare existence—get them to weaving romances about you, wondering about your past, trying to account for that mysteriously different look you wore, speculating whether it was a woman who had blighted your life and brought that premature touch of gray to your temples. You got them going like that, and then when their sympathy was ripe to pick, you broke loose suddenly, told them your sad life's story, let them see how hopeless and cynical and savage you were, all for the lack of a woman's sweet influence—the right woman, the woman there was only one of—in your life. And then you told her she was the woman. There was nothing to it after that.

This being Shean's invariable technique, it is not to be wondered at that though Hazel occasionally turned a thoughtful eye on him, she did not, for a while, make out who he was driving at. Indeed, she might have been slower than she was in making the discovery if Rags had not had by way of chaperon a sort of aunt—a thin, respectable, chronically scandalized lady who took her duties very seriously, came to the theater for every performance and glared disapproval of Hazel whenever she caught sight of her.

Their dressing-room—the one she and Rags shared,

was too small to admit the possibility of any third person getting in while the two girls were dressing. The aunt was much too superior a person to spend her time in the wardrobe room visiting with old Keziah Strong, the wardrobe mistress, so she sat out in the middle of a clear space they used for rehearsals and did highly ornate embroidery.

Well, when Hazel came out of the dressing-room suddenly one day, intent on getting Keziah to hook her up the back and saw Shean talking to Rags' aunt, saw him looking more like a well preserved young duke than usual and keeping the lady in a perfect twitter of appreciation, she saw through the game at a glance. The look in her face as she stood there watching them was that of a person who has just discovered that his breakfast egg is musty.

"Damn!" said a heartfelt voice beside her, and without looking around to see where it came from, she said: "Play that across the board for me."

Then she did look, and it was Rags' fat, dumpy, fresh little chorus man. What had she said his name was? Cissy something.

The discovery took Hazel by surprise. And the fact that he was as surprised as she was over her answer, and that there they stood, looking straight into each other's faces, with a quite clear understanding of all each other meant, made it a little difficult for

her to get back on her high horse again and treat him with the contempt he deserved.

Besides, except for the fact that he was a chorus man, there was nothing particularly contemptible about him. He was funny looking—made you want to laugh, especially when he was solemn. But that wasn't a fault necessarily. It was possible, as Rags suggested, to be a good joke as well as a bad one. And then, there was something earnest and unspoiled and innocent about him and he had said damn in such a nice satisfying way, that the high horse didn't seem exactly to be called for.

He turned and stared again, malignantly, at Luttrell Shean's admirably tailored back.

"Been buzzin' round, buzzin' round like that for fifteen minutes, the bald-headed old buzzard," he observed.

Hazel giggled. It was a libel to call Luttrell Shean bald-headed. If the grayish hair that was brushed so carefully across his forehead had its roots rather far down at the side, it looked none the worse for that. And buzzard! Well, Hazel was always grateful for a new epithet. She never would have thought of calling anybody that.

So it happened that they were standing there, quite amicably, almost like old friends, when little Rags came out of the dressing-room.

The first look that came over Rags' face, and lasted only about a fifth of a second, was of unaffected and rather pleased astonishment. It was gone before even Hazel saw it. The look that followed was a grin of clear derision, and Hazel caught it full, so that she started a little and drew about twelve inches farther away from Cissy and broke off the remark she had been about to make, as if saying anything to him at all had been the very last thing she ever contemplated.

That was what made Cissy turn around and look for himself. By that time Rags had on a third expression —very haughty, indeed, and a little hurt. As she walked by she ignored him aggressively, with a little toss of the head that seemed to say that if people wanted to be so absorbed talking to other people that they couldn't even see people coming out of their dressing-room they might simply take the consequences.

Rags walked straight over to her aunt, who was fluttering and palpitating anew under some fresh gallantry of Shean's.

"Damn!" said little Cissy again. "Look at that. He's asking them to supper with him."

And Rags' ecstatic, "Oh, we'd love to," came across to them very clearly.

Cissy's face was tragic enough now to have wrung a laugh from a Drama Club attending an Ibsen matinée.

"Say," he said earnestly, "we got to break that up."

"We?" said Hazel, and she let the gaze of her green eyes trickle slowly down him from head to foot.

But he took the snub so humbly that she relented a little.

"Why would I help break it up?" she wanted to know. "So that you could ask her and her aunt to go and have a beer at Sammy's instead?"

It wasn't said unkindly though, and Cissy acknowledged the implication with a rueful laugh.

"It don't matter about me," he said. "But she's such a kid." . . .

Hazel grinned. "What do you call yourself?" she inquired.

"Well, I don't call myself George M. Cohan, nor Dave Warfield, nor anything like that, but if I ever got a chance I could show up that morgue over there." And he turned another malignant glare in the direction of Mr. Shean.

"My Gawd!" said Hazel. "I believe you've understudied him."

The fat little chorus man blushed so that it showed through his make-up.

"Well," he said defensively, "I went and asked Mr. Boldt who I'd better understudy, and he said, 'Take Shean,' so I did."

Hazel was enough of an actress to keep her face

straight until she got into the wardrobe room. Freddy Boldt was something of a humorist in his own way.

All the same the kid was right. The thing ought to be broken up before it went any further. Hazel might have been puzzled to find a reason. Shean had the remains of a really big reputation, and his wives generally managed to capitalize it rather profitably after they divorced him. And there was no question of his not marrying Rags—if that way of putting it will serve. He always married them. Any pretty girl who could get him out in an automobile on a dark night, after his last wife had got rid of him, could lead him up to a justice of the peace in the morning. There was no danger that Rags would be "betrayed." But Hazel didn't stop to look for a reason. She just knew. With a little more knowledge of natural history she might have explained that a buzzard ought to stick to carrion and not try to prey on skylarks. It was just a healthy youthful instinct in her, as it was in Cissy, to revolt at the idea of anything old and imperfectly preserved and emotionally bankrupt being mated with a youth and zest and a headlong reckless innocence like Rags'. Yes, the kid was right. It had to be broken up.

Hazel was a pretty competent young person with an amount of self-confidence fully adequate to her powers. It ought to be easy enough in the course

of their dressing-room confidences to hand Shean a jolt or two that would do the business. It was a good bet that Rags didn't know a thing about him.

So she brought up the subject light-heartedly enough the very next night, after waiting until they were half dressed for Rags to bring it up herself. She and her aunt had been out to supper with him, and it was a little bit queer that the kid wasn't fizzing with it.

"Have a good time with old ivory-top last night?" was her opening gambit.

It ought to have got a rise out of Rags, because, as I have said, Shean's baldness was more real than apparent.

But Rags was intently heating her eyebrow blacking in the gas and said, "Uh-huh," so indifferently that Hazel had to wait a minute and start all over again.

"He ought to know how to do it by this time," she said presently. "He's been having chickens like you for supper for the last twenty-five years."

Rags giggled.

"That's no joke," said Hazel.

Rags said that wasn't what she was laughing at—and giggled again.

"Something funny he said last night?" Hazel persisted, trying to keep a slightly acrid tang of impa-

tience out of her voice. "Some flossy comeback he handed Willy Collier at the Lambs?"

"Oh, no," said Rags, making a final dab or two with her orange stick. "*He* didn't try to be funny."

"Well, then," demanded Hazel, "who is the joke? Me?"

Rags exploded in a little snort of laughter. "You and Cissy," she finally managed to say.

"Me and . . .!" Hazel broke off speechless. "Well, you certainly have got one nerve," she concluded, when she got her breath.

"Nerve yourself," observed Rags primitively. "Pretending he wasn't fit to look at, talkin' as if he hadn't any name," here Rags turned away from the mirror with an oratorical gesture of protest, "like he was —was just a greasespot on the floor, and the next minute over in a dark corner with him. . . ."

"Oh, beat a retreat," said Hazel disgustedly. "Go back to the bag. You won't get any wild pitches out of me."

"But I don't see," Rags went on plaintively, "why you should start in to roast Mr. Shean just because Cissy's sore at him."

There was nothing for it but physical violence after that, and Hazel, with an exasperated laugh, tried to shake her.

But the shaking didn't come off. Rags' young arms were surprisingly strong. Hazel uttered an imperfectly suppressed squeal.

"Quit it, you little brat! Quit it, I tell you. You're spoiling my make-up."

There came a knock on the dressing-room door and the voice of Freddy Boldt outside adjuring them to cut out the rough stuff.

"Oh, back up," said Hazel, smoothing her ruffled plumage before the mirror. "We thought we saw a mouse."

But the project of putting a spoke in Mr. Shean's wheel had not prospered; and Rags' angle on it—attributing it perspicaciously to a vicarious jealousy originating with Cissy Blake—estopped Hazel pretty effectively from trying it again. From now on it had to be little old Henry W. Watch and Wait for hers.

Well, the May days warmed and lengthened into June, and Shean's campaign seemed to be warming up, too. Rags was uncommunicative, but portentously spent more time than was her wont before her mirror, under the pretext of making up, staring at herself and—if it is not too far-fetched a surmise—thinking.

Poor little Cissy Blake went about looking solemn enough to be the hero of a farce. But Hazel rather discouraged his confidences. For one thing, she didn't like to own how lamentably she had failed as an ally.

Cissy, it appeared, couldn't do much either. He had just ten chances a week to speak to Rags—three minutes, or such a matter, along in the middle of the first act, while they were waiting in the wings, right, Rags and the eight chorus men, to come on and do a song. The demon aunt didn't feel equal to climbing the stairs for so brief an interval and Shean was down in the dressing-room making his first change. Ten chances a week, theoretically. But Cissy wasn't able to accept them all. More than half the time Rags stood down in the first entrance chatting with Props, who had charge of the ribbons she drove the chorus men about the stage with in case there was a third encore.

But sometimes she squeezed into the third entrance, and as Cissy led the file, they stood for three minutes, as I said, side by side, and then she talked to him in whispers—oh, wonderfully—about how warm it was getting and whether the audience was going to like her to-night and things like that. And on those occasions Cissy came down to the chorus men's dressing-room afterward quite transfigured.

He didn't dare even look at her at any other time, for fear her aunt would see and suspect something and take to coming up-stairs with Rags herself. Cissy invented a number of horrible destructions for this aunt, each more lingering and Oriental than the last,

until the paradox occurred to him that this very lady was all that stood between Shean and the successful consummation of his plans.

You could see that plainly enough from the way Shean looked at her when she turned an unsuspecting back. And the thing that must have made it most maddening was that it was not prudence—not a chaperonly desire to thwart the comedian, but her own delight in his society and a comic belief on her part that he reciprocated it. Shean had overplayed his gallantries to the demon aunt, there could be no doubt about that, and plan as he might, he could concoct no successful device—suppers, breakfasts, outings, stratagems that would have done credit to a Napoleon—for getting little Rags off by herself. If it ever occurred to him that Rags might have been of more material assistance in bringing about this object than she was, he dismissed it without misgivings, charging it to the wonderful youth and innocence of her, and loved her all the more wildly, just as he the more insanely hated the aunt every time.

So, it was with a feeling in which despair and hope joined hands, that Cissy waylaid Hazel one Saturday afternoon, just as she was coming in the stage door. His manner was so legibly marked "Important—personal," that she made no bones about stopping then and there for his news.

"She's sick," Cissy told her.

Hazel made a wrong guess. "Rags?" she asked. "What's the matter?"

"Rags nothing," said Cissy. "The aunt. She came in just now . . ."

"Who? The aunt?" said Hazel.

"Aunt nothing," said Cissy. His voice was a whisper, but his manner was a shout. "Rags, I tell you. All alone. And—and she stopped and told me. Bronchitis—a week, anyway."

"Happy days!" said Hazel.

"Yes," said Cissy. "But it gives him a chance, too. Can't you see?"

"'Swat, I meant," said Hazel grimly. "What'ju think I was talking about?"

"But," said the fat little chorus man desperately, "can't you—can't you look after her yourself? Sort of—stick around, you know?"

"Do I look like an aunt?" demanded Hazel.

She stood there a minute, though, making a wry thoughtful face, and Cissy waited in tremulous eagerness for the oracle to speak. But it was only with a shrug of her slim shoulders that she turned away.

"Cheer up," she said not unkindly, over his look of despair. "Cheer up. Worse is yet to come."

The suspense would soon be over, anyway. The aunt's sickness clearly forced a show-down, and the

mixture of excitement and relief Hazel felt over this fact showed the girl how much she took the issue to heart. It was like her, though, to treat this emotion derisively. "Regular old maid with a canary," she mused. "Hell!" And she turned on Rags, in the dressing-room, the best imitation of indifference that she could muster.

Rags managed to remain an enigma longer than one would have thought possible. She was dressing so slowly that there was no chance for her to come out while Cissy was hanging about outside. He had to be on the stage, of course, for the opening chorus. But she continued to loiter in the dressing-room until within about two minutes of her first cue, which cut off equally, any chance for a visit with Shean who sat all the while with his door open, watching for her appearance. Cissy informed Hazel hoarsely during the final ensemble of the first act that Rags had thrown him down—a statement that had reference to his precious three minutes when they waited in the wings together, and this would have seemed conclusive if, along in the second act, Rags hadn't broken away from Shean himself, pleading necessary repairs. Hazel had followed her to the dressing-room, ostensibly to help, and judged from Rags' abstracted attitude before the mirror that the plea had been fictitious.

This encouraged her to try an experiment. "S'long's your aunt's sick," she suggested casually, "you might come along to dinner with old Keziah and me."

"Thanks, honey," said Rags. "I'd love to." But there was a reserve about her manner as she said it that Hazel didn't risk prying into.

Hazel had never confided her perplexities about Rags to Keziah, for the simple reason that, to give point to the tale, it would have been necessary to sketch for her benefit a more or less realistic biography of Luttrell Shean. And, as no doting mother ever guarded the innocence of her budding daughter more carefully than Hazel did Keziah's, the thing was impracticable. Still she used her—used the very voluminous innocence of her, as pious folk used to use the Bible, opening her at random, as it were, in cases of perplexity, and taking her casual utterances as law and gospel.

Therefore, she was not without a hope that somehow or other, at this dinner, Keziah would solve the problem of Rags. And, as a matter of fact, she did.

They had their dinner in a quiet little bakery restaurant—Keziah, just her placid, beaming self; Hazel rather silent and very alert, and little Rags fizzing and sparkling and brimming over the edge of the glass with gaiety; so that people for tables around

almost forgot to eat, and the waitress stuck to their own table like a limpet.

But just as they finished up their strawberry shortcake and were getting ready to go back to the theater, Rags turned a bit graver and said wait a minute, she wanted to ask grandma something. (Ordinarily the wardrobe mistress is ex officio, "ma," but in Keziah's case, an extra generation seemed to be fitting.)

Rags was fumbling in her wrist-bag and Hazel, with a sense that something was coming, tried to look a warning at the old lady. But it was beyond her power of pantomime; and anyway, if she tried too hard, Keziah would be sure to ask her what she was making faces about.

Rags was smoothing out a note. "Mr. Shean," she said, "wants me to go for—well, a sort of picnic with him to-morrow, all day. Just him and me. Do you think it would be all right to tell him I'll go?"

Naturally she would have looked at old Keziah as she asked it. If she had, Hazel would have risked a negative shake of the head across the table. But, instead of looking at Keziah, Rags, with a pair of round blue eyes that seemed to have a twinkle of defiance in them, looked straight at Hazel herself, so Hazel just held her breath and waited. She hadn't to wait long.

"Any harm?" said old Keziah. "Why, not a mite,

child. Of course with young men these days, I s'pose. . . . But Mr. Shean. . . . Why, he's old enough to be your father."

"That's what I thought," said Rags demurely, and she put the note back in her wrist-bag.

And Hazel was in such a boiling rage that she didn't dare open her mouth more than about a quarter of an inch until—well, until the next night at the show, when the picnic was over.

"This is your day, little girl," said Luttrell Shean, with what he felt to be just the right mixture of humor and tenderness in his voice. "Where would you like to go?"

The stress was on the you, because he was saying it in answer to Rags' ecstatic, "Isn't it just the loveliest day? We mustn't lose a minute. Where shall we go?" She had said that, giving him both hands to shake and then stepped back and looked him over with awe.

"My, but you do look grand," she had added, before he could speak.

They were standing in the lobby of the family hotel where Rags and the demon aunt lived, and out of the corner of his eye, Shean had caught a grin of irreverent amusement on the face of the clerk, so he led her a little nearer the door before he answered.

As he had rehearsed the scene that morning while he brushed his hair and filed his nails, it had gone just about like this. But what Rags said as they reached the door, was not the speech her lines called for.

Shean had, as a matter of fact, planned the day pretty carefully. It had to begin, prosaically enough, with a train ride up the shore. But after an hour of that, you got off at a place where there was an excellent inn not much frequented yet, as the season was immature. There would be breakfast and a nice long talk on the veranda there, and then a stroll through the fields and down to the beach, and after that—well, it would be as circumstances indicated. They could motor back to town, perhaps, in the gathering twilight.

But it all depended, you will observe, on Rags' saying, when he told her so tenderly it was to be her day, "Oh, but you must decide that."

Instead, Rags said cheerfully: "Well then, let's begin by going to Lincoln Park to see the animals."

Well, dash it all, she was just a kid! He might have known she'd say something like that. After all, it didn't involve the waste of more than half an hour or so.

It ran to more than that, really, and it wore Shean's benevolently paternal manner pretty near threadbare. The park was crowded full in celebration of the first

really summerish Sunday morning of the year. He wormed his way behind her through the press, getting his immaculately varnished boots trodden on by the *hoi polloi*. He bought pop-corn balls, whose fragments stuck to the fingers of his gray suede gloves when he tried to feed the monkeys. He was interrupted every time he managed to get up close to the girl and sound the 'cello note of sentiment, by a squeal of delight from Rags herself over some new wonder behind the bars; and the taxi they had come from the hotel in was ticking away suggestively in the background all the while. Rags had wanted him to dismiss it, but he insisted on keeping it within call. Once he could get her into it again, he wouldn't wait for any more suggestions from her.

But luck was against him. He had drawn her away from the beasts at last, and was steering her along by one arm toward the taxi, when they crossed the bridle-path. And just at that moment, a party of young people rode by at a canter.

Rags, her face all alight with eagerness, looked up at him and squeezed his arm.

"Oh," she cried, "isn't that lovely! Mayn't we—mayn't we *please* go for a ride? You do ride, don't you? Oh, but of course. I know you do."

Shean wore a pair of riding breeches and carried a crop during a part of the first act, and unfortunately,

this fact had led him to expatiate to Rags and her aunt, during one of their suppers, upon his skill as a horseman. He could ride a little for a fact. That is, he could manage to post if he didn't lose count.

"Really," he protested, trying not to look as disconcerted as he felt, "I'm afraid it won't be possible. We couldn't get any horses in this God-forsaken town. Isn't it a shame?"

"Oh, but we can," said Rags. "Hazel and I heard about a place and looked it up. We meant to go together sometime. It's up in Edgewater, and they have lovely horses. Can't we try? Please."

I will not put down the remark that Luttrell Shean confided to the palm of his gloved hand as he twisted his waxed mustache. But he got into the taxi and repeated the address that Rags provided him with to the chauffeur.

It is five miles to Edgewater, and contrary to Shean's prayerful hopes, there were horses to be got when they arrived there. There were also leather gaiters for Mr. Shean, and a divided khaki skirt—rather too big—for Rags.

Rags' notion of a ride, common in the woolly parts of the West, was to dig in her knees, spank the flank of her steed resonantly with a flat hand and go off at a gallop. She found a mount that met her ideas perfectly. In fact, she found two, for the beast that

they had hoisted Shean upon was a sociable creature with a picnic disposition.

I am going to draw a decent veil of charity over the details of the next two hours. Shean lived through it, somewhat to his own astonishment and eventually found himself ordering lunch at an iron table in a neat little gravelly garden restaurant, just opened for the season. He had managed to get himself more or less to rights. His hair, for instance, after considerable indiscretions, was in the straight and narrow path again. He felt like the devil, there was no doubt of that. His underclothes stuck to him, his hands trembled violently whenever he bent his elbows beyond a right-angle, and from the waist down, he felt as if he had been racked.

He looked across at Rags, with mingled feelings. There was no disguising the fact that she had never looked so delectable to him before. There she sat, all moist and flushed and radiant, her tumbled hair curlier than ever, her eyes gleaming with the exhilaration of youth. But when she said, "It's being just the most wonderful day. I'm glad it is nowhere near over yet, aren't you?" he was conscious that he answered with a certain reserve. If the day went on as it had begun, she would probably kill him before night. But from now on he meant that things should go differently.

They had a corner table pretty well screened from the rest of the garden by a couple of orange trees in tubs and, as it was long past anybody else's lunch hour, they had the place pretty much to themselves.

He moved his chair around the table a little nearer hers and got hold of one of her hands. The girl flushed a little, but didn't pull her hand away. He managed to give the act and his subsequent caresses —for he by no means stopped there—just the sort of quasi-paternal air that makes them hardest for a young girl to resist. For there is nothing that innocence hates so much as to show how innocent it is. He might have noted how the gaiety had gone out of her face, how limp the little hands he fondled were—and perhaps he did. Well, she owed him something for that morning's gallop. What did she suppose he had taken her out for? It was only a touch of stage-fright anyway. She'd be over it directly.

And then he began to talk—pretty well, too, for that line of goods. To be sure he had rehearsed it often enough. He was very Byronic, indeed; very cynical, very down on the world. It was a gray world nowadays. There was no more color in it—no more opportunity for the high quality of romance. Back in the good old knightly days, a man could do something for the girl he loved, to show himself worthy of her—there were perils to rescue her from,

trials to undergo and her favor on his helm could be a constant inspiration to knightly deeds. Shean, it appeared, was just gorged with knightly deeds, but these rotten commercial, modern times gave him no opportunity to get them out of his system. There was no room in the world for a gentleman any longer. The counter-jumper had the best of it.

And all the while his 'cello voice was playing variations on this theme, he sidled closer and closer, his arm along the back of her chair, his hand—unconsciously, of course—stroking her arm and shoulder; one of his knees—accidentally, of course—pressed against hers under the table.

She was getting quieter now all right. But suddenly, exactly in the middle of it, Rags got up.

"Let's—let's go for a little walk somewhere," she said.

Well, it didn't do to crowd them too hard. With the best grace he could muster, Shean got up, too, and they strolled out of the garden and down one of the shady cross streets of the North Side, toward the lake. It was a hot breathless afternoon.

"Where do you suppose all these people are going?" said Rags. There were hundreds of them, a regular procession, all walking in their direction.

"Swimming, I fancy," said Shean. "There's a big public beach down here somewhere."

"Can you swim?" asked Rags indifferently. A little too indifferently, Shean might have guessed, had his perception been acute.

"Oh, yes," he said.

Well, that was true. He could swim across the Athletic Club tank. But he ought to have let it go at that.

"The last big swim I took," he went on musingly, "was one night last summer. We were down at Rockaway Beach. There were a bunch of us—been having a rather gay time, I am sorry to say, and on a bet, I swam across to Coney Island."

"How far is that?" asked Rags politely.

"Oh, about ten miles, I should say."

"My!" said Rags. "That's wonderful," and she looked up at him again with awe.

Shean's chest expansion came back to normal again. They walked on, getting nearer and nearer the lake all the time, and at last they came in sight of the pavilion and the beach. There were hundreds of bathers on the sands and in the water.

"I can swim pretty well, too," said Rags suddenly. "Wouldn't it be fun to go in—after our ride and all?"

Luttrell Shean shuddered, but Rags didn't notice. Her eyes were on the sporting figures in the water.

"Unfortunately," said Shean, "we haven't any bathing clothes with us."

"But nobody has," said Rags. "They all rent them here."

That time Shean's shudder did show. "A hired bathing suit!" he cried aghast. "Impossible!"

He was so genuinely horrified that little Rags blushed.

"They have canoes," she said, though, presently. "Shall we take a canoe and just go out and paddle around? The water's awfully smooth."

Shean would have discouraged that project, too, if she hadn't added:

"Or perhaps you don't paddle a canoe."

Of course he did. There was nothing in the line of athletics that Shean didn't do.

They went to the pavilion and Shean made the necessary financial arrangements.

"Perhaps," said Rags joyously, as they crossed the beach, "perhaps the canoe will get upset and then you can rescue me." She looked up at him shyly and her voice dropped a little. "Would you?" she asked.

Shean pressed her arm in his. "Would I!" he said. "It's the dearest wish of my life to do something like that for you."

They were perhaps a hundred yards out from

shore, and fifty yards from the diving platform, when Rags who had been surveying the scene in a dreamy, contented silence, spoke again.

"I was talking to Mr. Heminway yesterday," she said (Heminway was the Globe press agent), "and he said that really to get on in the profession, you had to do things to make people talk about you—get you into the papers."

"Yes," said Shean bitterly, "that's the way people get along nowadays. It's no use to be an artist. Just a notoriety. That's what people want."

"I suppose," Rags went on, still rather dreamily, "that it would be good publicity if I did fall in the water now, and you rescued me."

"Of course it would," said Shean sardonically. "That's just what the fool public wants—a three-ring circus. What do they care for . . . ?"

Some little change in her expression, a sudden alertness with a dash of mischief in it, made him stop short, even on the utterance of his favorite word "art."

"Well," said little Rags nonchalantly, "that's what I'm going to do."

And she stood up, picked up her skirt and made a clean little jump into the water.

It is almost impossible for a person to get out of a canoe that way without capsizing it. And indeed it

did rock away over and ship a half-barrel of water. I can't possibly tell it as quickly as it happened. It was ten seconds perhaps before Rags came up. Shean was still sitting there in the canoe.

"Save me!" cried Rags, looking straight into Shean's face.

"Help!" cried Shean. But he did not manage to get the stern of the canoe around so that her clutching hand could reach it.

Little Rags disappeared again, and if she held her nose as she went down, Shean was too panic-stricken to notice the fact—though it is not the way a drowning person usually acts.

The next time she came up, she was exactly alongside of the canoe and her hands clutched the gunwale.

"Don't!" cried Shean in automatic terror. "You'll upset it!" Which was exactly what little Rags did.

He didn't know just what happened after that. When finally he emerged from the strangling welter, Rags, clinging to the inverted canoe with one hand, was clutching him with the other.

"Catch hold," she said. "Here, at the end. But don't try to get very far out of water. It's all right if you can breathe. Hang on. They're coming in a boat."

"Now," said Hazel, when the last curtain was down

and she and Rags reached their dressing-room, "now, you young imp, sit down there and tell me all about it. Did *you* know that Cissy Blake had understudied his lines?"

They hadn't had any chance to talk before, more than in gasps. It was all too exciting. Freddy Boldt estimated afterward that between seven-fifteen, when Shean had telephoned that he was paralyzed with lumbago and couldn't move hand nor foot, and ten-thirty, when they had swung into the last ensemble, he had aged at least ten years. Shean had told him of the accident and that Rags had been involved in it. So Boldt's first act was to telephone to Rags' hotel to learn whether they had lost her, too. But she, it seemed, was perfectly all right; on her way to the theater. Then he called up Prentiss, Shean's understudy and one of the minor principals, and told him to come to the theater as fast as he could for rehearsal. So far, nothing that had happened was necessarily fatal.

But when, at seven-thirty-five, two men from the street carried Prentiss into the theater with a dislocated knee, acquired by flipping off the street-car at the mouth of the alley in his haste to save two minutes, the real excitement began. One look at the knee settled Prentiss, who in tears begged to be allowed to try it anyway, and for a little while it

really looked like closing the house. It was Hazel who told the manager about Cissy Blake.

What they did to Cissy during the next three hours is not this story. They rehearsed him, dressed him, cursed him, rehearsed him some more, and they galvanized him with a high frequency alternating current of objurgation and encouragement. He gave, on the whole, a rather rotten performance, but Freddy thought, with training, he might amount to something. "And you certainly got to hand it to that boy," the manager concluded, "for nerve!"

But that wasn't what the two girls were talking about in the dressing-room.

"What I want to know is," Hazel demanded for the twentieth time, "whether *you* knew that Cissy had understudied his lines."

"What if I did?" Rags retorted. "I couldn't know Prentiss was going to fall off the street-car, could I?"

That seemed plausible. But then, what was Rags chortling about? Nothing, it appeared. Nothing, really.

"I hope you haven't caught cold or anything," said Hazel presently. "Shan't Keziah and me get a taxi and take you home?"

No, Rags was all right. And Cissy was going home with her. Indeed, he was audibly outside now, waiting.

It wasn't until just as she was going out that Hazel thought of another question.

"Did you know Prentiss was his understudy? That anybody knew his lines *but* Cissy?"

Rags' only answer to that was a look of round-eyed, childlike innocence, with perhaps just a twinkle. . . . Hazel couldn't be sure.

Oh, it was the Spring of the Year. That's the moral.

THE HIGH-BROW LADY

IF you are one of that rare and privileged few who sometimes have an opportunity of talking with Producing Managers, you will know that they are, in the main, a worried set of gentlemen, professing, in their more hopeful moods, a certain expertness in what the Public is going to like, and at other times an impassioned conviction that no such expertness exists; the only sure knowledge concerning the public taste being that nothing can be known. You spend your money on a production; you get five or six weeks of rehearsal out of pessimistically hopeful actors—whose salaries do not begin until the play is produced and last only as long as the play does—and then you take a chance; wait till the little spinning ball finally drops into its compartment in the wheel of fortune to see whether you have lost or won.

But Willy Lord was not like that at all. He didn't worry about the Public. He had found out by experience that if he liked a thing there was a sufficient number of persons in Chicago who would like it too to keep the six hundred seventy-eight seats in his shabby little theater pretty well occupied ten times a

week for six months or so. When they and Willy tired of one show he found them another and sent the old one out on the road, where, by avoiding New York and other sophisticated centers its total demise could be postponed for months—or even years.

Do you remember how, in childhood, after you had sucked an orange you filled it up again at the hydrant and enjoyed its dilute delights all over again? Well, it was a little like that.

But the point I meant to start out with was that though in the main Willy Lord's Globe shows were as like as baseballs he did sometimes indulge in the most breath-taking flights of fancy. I have already told you about how he engaged old Keziah Strong as wardrobe mistress—old Keziah, who never in her life had seen either side of a drop curtain—just because she came from his old home town in Massachusetts, and because she was a miraculous needle woman. Sending a sleek fireside tabby cat into a kennel of terriers would be a comparable act. Think of expecting a nice old Aunt Samanthy like that to cope with the wiles of twenty-four knowing, naughty chorus girls and to exercise the discipline over them that goes with her position!

The only possible justification of such an act lay in the fact that it worked. She astonished them as much as they did her, and by the time the mutual paralysis

wore off the old lady was a match for the whole of them.

I shall, perhaps, tell you the real story about old Keziah some day, and what the one thing in the world was that she was afraid of and how that one thing eventually happened and what happened then. But the particular flight of Willy Lord's fancy to which I invite your attention this morning is the vision he introduced Freddy Boldt to, in his little box of an office behind the box office, just before one Thursday matinée.

"This is Mr. Boldt, our stage manager," Willy explained to the vision as he came in, and then he pronounced her name—"Miss Enid Carey-Pole."

At least that is the way Willy pronounced it. It sounded queer enough to Freddy at that. When he saw it spelled out in the program, C-A-R-E-W-P-O-W-E-double L, and was informed on Willy Lord's sacred word of honor that it wasn't a misprint, it was queerer and more mystifying than ever. For the stage manager's comfort Willy told him about a Virginia family who spelled their name Enroughty and pronounced it Darby. However, that didn't happen till afterward.

"Miss Carew-Powell," the boss went on to explain, "is going to play Forget-me-not in *The Girl from Proctor's.*"

Forget-me-not was not the Girl from Procter's herself. *The* girl was one of those kind-hearted vampires who form, one might say, the corner-stone of musical comedy plot—a perfectly terrible adventuress of irresistible charm, whom all the women hate and with whom all the men make a rendezvous—at the same hour, of course—in the garden. And then it turns out, in the last act, that the adventuress has a heart of gold after all, and that all her intrigues have been calculated to restore the errant lover to the simple village maid—that is, she is supposed to be a simple village maid until the last act, when they find that she is really the long-lost heiress—the simple village maid, who is his neglected sweetheart. The adventuress herself is really and truly in love with somebody all the while. But he misunderstands her until five minutes before the last curtain, when he sees her in her true colors. That is a sufficient summary of the plot of *The Girl from Proctor's.*

Well, Forget-me-not was the village maid, of course, and she had been played—and was to go on being played for another ten days—by a round-eyed and rather dumpy blonde young lady, who looked a good deal like one of the Two Orphans and had a saccharine but rather mealy soprano voice. She had a couple of years' experience in stock, and lived on a passionate hope that she might some day get thin enough to

play Camille. Her name was Rowena Breckenridge, and she belonged vaguely to one of the old southern families that had been ruined by the war. You really have to have a considerable acquaintance among actors and actresses to form any notion of how many of those families there were. She had served two weeks' notice on Willy Lord anent a certain interpolated song which had been given to the second comedian and cut into one of her much-prized emotional scenes. She had meant this notice to be nothing more than a diplomatic form of remonstrance, and that was the way Freddy Boldt, who had transmitted it, had supposed it would be taken. Because the Globe audiences, especially at matinées, seemed to like Rowena pretty well.

But the boss had simply said, "All right," and the next thing Freddy knew here was Miss Enid Carew-Powell, produced from nowhere, as the next Forget-me-not. From nowhere, that is to say, as far as Freddy and the rest of the Globe people were concerned. If they had belonged to that part of the public that takes any interest in theatrical matters generally, Freddy would have known all about her already.

Miss Enid Carew-Powell had been one of a band of those people who call themselves players rather than actors, by way of establishing a distinction between themselves and the ordinary actor in the theater of

commerce. They had come to Chicago a few weeks before, heralded by the conventionally esthetic brown-paper prospectus, which announced their modest purpose of elevating the stage and of showing us what we ought to like, in a *repertoire* made up of plays that had never known the blight of popularity; so that if one liked them—or said he liked them—he became, automatically, a member of a very small and precious class. Some of these plays were called classics, by which it was meant that they were the unpopular work of men who had been otherwise successful in their day. Others were contemporary works, mostly by anemic poets.

And although the prospectus was headed by a statement, in quotes, to the effect that the play was the thing, nevertheless it informed us that the acting we were about to see would let the pure morning light of real histrionic art in upon our benighted minds.

It didn't do that exactly. But the Southwarke Players did manage to furnish, for a couple of weeks or so, to the academically superior, a comforting sense of their isolation—to the discerning, a kind of tragical amusement—to the professional critics, a real field day, and to the public generally a theme for argument at dinner. Then they died a miserable death—in the middle of the week, if you please; which, in the world of the theater, is the crowning ignominy. You can

withdraw on Saturday night, with the tatters of various polite fictions drawn about you to save your self-respect. But when you have to close on Tuesday, simply because there is absolutely no one but the ushers in the front of the house! . . .

Well, that is what happened to the Southwarke Players. And most of them took a morning train on one of the differential lines to New York. But Enid Carew-Powell sat in her room at the hotel and wondered what was going to happen to her next.

What did happen was Willy Lord with an offer of seventy-five dollars a week—(she figured it out in pounds sterling, glad, if the truth be told, that it went into that denomination rather than shillings, which, at her own valuation of herself just then, she was prepared for)—an offer of seventy-five dollars a week, as I say, to play Forget-me-not in *The Girl from Proctor's*. And Enid had had to hold her breath a second or two before she answered. And if her voice, when she did answer, sounded more icily English than usual—English of the very highest altitude at which it is possible to sustain human life, this was because she had been so frightened, and she was now so absurdly grateful that she felt an impulse to fling herself on Willy Lord's broad chest and weep; and because she was so afraid that both the fright and the gratitude might show.

Willy Lord, who had peculiar intuitions, may have guessed at this, but the ordinary observer could hardly have believed it. If a Drury Lane duchess could be half so regal in assenting to the terms of the villain who had her in his power, her fame with American audiences would be made.

She was still feeling little clutches of that panicky sort of gratitude to the boss when he introduced Freddy to her the next morning at the theater.

Anyway, the first word she said to Freddy when he asked her how she liked the part, was "Really."

I spell it in the natural way, because no spelling can possibly indicate the way in which that particular sort of English person pronounces that particular word.

Freddy jumped. Because she didn't look like the sort of person to start kidding a guy the first minute she was introduced to him. She had pulled that one with a straight face to be sure, but it couldn't be that any one talked like that seriously.

She went on—after the "Really"—to say that she didn't know how she was going to like the part, because it had only just been handed to her, and she had yet to see a performance of the piece.

The whole speech was executed faultlessly in a manner that Josephine Foster would have given six inches of her hair to be able to imitate when she

played the Newport society swell whose son the wicked adventuress . . . Oh, never mind about the plot!

And it wasn't only the voice in which she said it. The look which accompanied her words had a sort of chemical property about it that made Freddy's tie feel too red, his waistcoat—a waistcoat he rather fancied, too—feel ready-made and boisterous, his shoes as if they were on the wrong feet, and Freddy, inside of them, crawly and red and unhappy.

Freddy wasn't in the habit of feeling like that. There wasn't a servile joint in his body. From the time when he had been a plain little mutt selling newspapers out on the West Side he had made his way along by being smarter and quicker and readier to learn than a lot of other people who had had greater apparent advantages. And appearances didn't bother him a bit. He never took any of this up-stage stuff from anybody, and it was his observation of life that the harder people tried to impress him with their superiority the hollower false-alarms they were and the more easily demolished.

There was no time for a retort just then—hardly to say it, let alone to think it up. The assistant stage manager had called the overture before Freddy went out in front, and it was high time that he was back on the job. He stammered out something to this

effect and retired, in bad order, as a military man would say—sorer, by his own confession, than the boil on the back of a man's neck.

And yet at this point it is necessary to distinguish. There is a sort of dislike that makes you wish the object of it could be decently drowned or sent as a missionary to some interior part of the Island of Borneo. There is another sort that makes you think how pleasant it would be to punch somebody in the eye. And there is a third sort which leads you to imagine long-drawn scenes between yourself and the person you dislike, wherein she—for that is her sex, as a rule, if you happen to be a man—comes to you in the dust and ashes of humiliation and wants to be forgiven and tells you how ashamed she is of herself that she was so stupid as to misunderstand the sort of person you really were and wants you to try to forget the past and to give her a fresh start. You don't know whether you can or not, but . . . Well, at all events, you keep the scene going.

There was no doubt at all that Freddy disliked Miss Enid Carew-Powell on the strength of that one brief interview. But—have I told you?—she really was demoralizingly pretty, in her cold, disagreeably English way, and I'll give you three guesses as to which class of dislike Freddy's feelings fell into.

It was a piece of pure luck that five minutes after

He caught one of the ponies trying to steal on the stage ten seconds late.

the first act began he caught one of the ponies trying to sneak on to the stage ten seconds late. After he had fined her a dollar for being late, and another dollar for telling him that "Well, she couldn't help it," had indicated in fact that all her subsequent remarks would cost her a dollar apiece—and packed her off down-stairs—not in tears, because chorus girls don't cry (they can't without going to the trouble of making up all over again), but with the same sort of feeling that he himself had carried away from Willy Lord's office and Miss Enid Carew-Powell—he felt a whole lot better.

Freddy nobly repressed a desire to take the company into his confidence regarding the prospective newcomer in the cast. Loyalty to Willy Lord, as well as a sense of his own official responsibility, forbade. However, it was comforting to reflect that the person who played opposite to her, and who would meet her in rehearsal to-morrow afternoon, was Tom O'Hara.

Tom was a juvenile of the "Hello, folks!" variety, who played the part of Teddy Van Astorbilt, the scion of a proud line of Newport society swells, who, you remember, neglects his simple village sweetheart to take a shy at the adventuress. Tom played it with floppy hair and Cohanesque effects, which the Globe audiences took to exceedingly. Tom had a vaudeville vocabulary, and, as Freddy Boldt had foreseen, what

he had to say after that first rehearsal about Miss Enid Carew-Powell was a-plenty.

So at the next rehearsal it was extraordinary how many of the principal people found something to do that necessitated their hanging about in the wings, whence they watched and listened breathlessly, asked one another in raucous whispers if they could beat it, and indignantly wanted to know what the profession was coming to. The unanimous conclusion of the symposium was that if Willy Lord were only running a convention of citrus fruit growers, he had here, in his new Forget-me-not, an exhibit that would be sure of the blue ribbon.

I don't want you to do the Globe people an injustice, though, on the strength of this statement. They are as friendly folk, in the main, as you could find anywhere. The other day when I was making them a visit I happened upon an impromptu dancing lesson in the wings given by the star to one of the chorus men, and it ended with her offering to rehearse him as often as he liked. "He's an ambitious kid," she explained to me; "wants to get out of the chorus. I'd help anybody to do that." And, really, that's the Globe way. There are jealousies and private feuds, of course, but you'll go a long way before you'll find as much unaffected, matter-of-fact helping of the weak

by the strong as is taken for granted in the narrow little wings of the Globe.

Enid was one of the weak, all right. She had so little knowledge of stage strategy that taking a scene away from her was like the traditionally mean, but possibly philanthropic act of taking candy away from a baby. But if people of that pitiable and helpless sort chose to be fishy and superior, they did it at their proper peril.

As a matter of fact, she remained so bad in spite of Freddy's efforts to teach her some of the rudiments of acting that when it came to the night of her first performance they all pitched in and did their frantic best to pull her through. Not so much from charity as from mere professional instinct.

There had been a hope that when there was a real audience out in front she would open up a little; get up at least a pound or two of steam behind her lines; show some recognition of the rights of the six hundred seventy-eight out beyond the orchestra pit who had paid their money to be entertained. But she did nothing at all like that. She wandered inconclusively about the stage; she read her lines as if they could have no interest in the world except to the person they were addressed to; and her big line in the first act, when she took down her hair in order to give the ribbon to

her departing lover—"It's just a faded ribbon. Your love for me will fade like that"—this line, I say, which Rowena Breckenridge had delivered in three separate sobs and, it being a song cue for her first lyric, had carried clear down to the footlights, with her hand on her heart—this line was read by Enid sitting down and looking up-stage at nowhere in particular as a simple statement of fact. She'd have sung her song that way, too (she had a rather pretty singing voice of the parlor variety) if Freddy had let her.

The others, as I say, worked their heads off for her in a hopeless attempt to carry her across, prevent the scenes in which she played from dying of sheer anemia. But did she show any gratitude? Nothing in the least like it. She came from her dressing-room into the wings just in time for her cue, and from the stage she went back into her dressing-room without a word to throw at a dog.

Freddy Boldt, who never budged from the first entrance all the time she was on the stage, looked after her with the most maddeningly inexplicable compound of feelings that had ever beset him. It wasn't his funeral, was it? he protested savagely to himself. He hadn't hired her—hadn't recommended her. He had done his best to teach her to act, and the boss knew it. And in spite of that she treated him like dirt. Sarah Bernhardt herself, if Willy Lord had hired her,

wouldn't have had any license to walk past him in that peculiarly offensive, unseeing way. She said something, too, as she went by that sounded like "sorry," though what she meant by it he hadn't an idea. Something insulting, no doubt.

So the only feeling Freddy had any business with was one of derisive amusement. He had scored one on the boss, and the audience had avenged him on Enid Carew-Powell. Whether the boss kept her on or got rid of her, Freddy had nothing to do but grin.

But he couldn't do that. For some preposterous reason he felt utterly sick about the whole thing —felt as if he had swallowed a lead dollar—as if he were about to lose his job—as if a clairvoyant had wished seven years of bad luck on him. Tom O'Hara had made a joke, there in the wings, and some of the other principals were laughing at it. He had nicknamed the new Forget-me-not, Miss Carry Spear. Not a particularly good joke, because its implication was that the lady's real place was in the second line in a burlesque show, which was absurd, but painful rather than funny.

However, the others were enjoying it when Freddy, with fire in his eyes, swept down upon them like a devastation. But just as he was getting into his stride, telling them that if they thought this was a bear garden, they'd better go and get jobs in one, but that as

long as he held his job there was going to be quiet in the wings from the principals, as well as from the chorus—just as he was getting limbered up, I say, he happened to meet the green eyes of Hazel Dering.

Hazel was now, if you please, the girl from Proctor's that the piece was named after. She was so obviously the type for an adventuress that Willy Lord, with one of his customary flashes of inspiration, had given her the part.

I don't suppose it would be possible for anybody really to be as knowing as Hazel Dering looked. But even at that she knew a good deal. And when Freddy Boldt met the thoughtful, half-veiled stare of her green eyes and saw a quirk of a smile at one corner of her mouth he got an electric shock that brought him up short, right in the middle of a sentence. Hazel had made him a good deal of trouble once, but those times were long past and they were pretty good friends now.

She came across to him, slipped her arm through his in a friendly sort of way and led him back into the first entrance again, drawing him down beside her on the lid of the upright piano.

"Don't you care, Freddy," she said comfortably. "You've done your best. And you have taught her quite a lot. She didn't go near so bad out in front as I thought she would. They didn't laugh her to death

right on the stage. I suppose she's got so much class they're afraid to laugh, that's one thing."

"What do you mean, 'class'?" growled Freddy.

But Hazel wouldn't try to explain beyond telling him he knew what she meant. He didn't exactly, but for some inexplicable reason he found her remark comforting.

He wasn't a reflective character, little Freddy Boldt, but he lapsed now into a ruminant silence. If the cud he was chewing was somewhat bitter to the taste, still he went on chewing it. Hazel, without moving her head, slewed her green eyes around and stole a look at him. What she saw in his face made her smile.

"You know," she said after a little silence, "old Keziah says we've got the wrong steer about her."

"Wrong steer, your aunt!" said Freddy. "What does old Keziah know about acting? Anyway, she's never seen her act."

"That isn't what I meant," she said, "and you know it. Not about her acting at all. About her. Keziah says she ain't up-stage a bit, really. Says she's scared about half to death."

"Scared!" grunted Freddy. "She looks scared, doesn't she? What's she scared of?"

"Us," said Hazel. And after a momentary hesitation and with another flicker of her green eyes, she added: "You, mostly."

"Go on!" said Freddy. "Put on the soft pedal. Fade away." But he was indiscreet enough to look around, and Hazel again caught his eye.

He was blushing! It's the gospel truth.

A psychologist would find material for a book in that blush. Why should Freddy's heart beat faster over a jocular hint that Enid Carew-Powell's dislike of him was more apparent than real; that she might be afraid of him?

His career, up to now, included numerous love affairs and one matrimonial venture that had terminated in his determination never to risk another. If he fell in love again it would naturally be with some one he liked—felt comfortable with; somebody who gave him pleasant little indications that she liked him. Enid wasn't his kind of girl at all. He liked them plump and jolly—good scouts, you know.

Well, then, what was it that kept him thinking about her; that made her in a crowd the only person he saw; that kept him awake at night thinking up witty, stinging, indifferent things to say to her, and then reduced him to a stuttering blockhead the next day when he had a chance to say them?

Clearly, that state of mind is not being in love. But the symptoms of the two states are so grotesquely alike that the principals, as well as the seconds, fre-

quently make a wrong diagnosis and horrible consequences ensue.

I doubt if that blush really fooled Hazel, though. There was something distinctly impish about that green-eyed young lady, and I should do less than my duty if I did not put you on your guard against her. Freddy ought to have known better, certainly, and if he narrowly escaped disaster, no prudence of his own, but only plain, undeserved good luck was what saved him.

If Hazel had been a crudely facetious person, with the chorus girl's practical and energetic sense of humor, she had material in that blush for making Freddy's life a burden for the next six months. All she would have to do would be to get Tom O'Hara and Josephine Foster and a few more of the bunch together and tell them that the stage manager had fallen wildly in love with "Carry." Nobody would ask for evidence. As a matter of fact, Freddy would make up the evidence himself as the joke went along under its own steam.

But though one might almost say that Hazel had been born a chorus girl, this line of action did not appeal to her at all. She had the subtlety to perceive something a great deal better.

She got up from the piano lid, but stood for a minute where she was, looking at him, a mysterious suggestion of a smile about her mouth, and a thought-

ful look in her eyes. Freddy pretended to be watching the stage.

"I'm going up to see her," said Hazel; "make her a little visit."

"Put on your arctics and your earmuffs," growled Freddy. "If you get frost-bitten, you can't dance."

Hazel laughed and patted him on the head. Then she turned and went straight up the iron stair that led to Enid's dressing-room.

The voice that said, "Come in," in answer to her knock, gave her a moment's misgiving. But old Keziah had never steered her wrong yet, and she mustered up her courage and went in.

Enid was sitting in front of her mirror, and it was there that she saw who her visitor was.

For three frozen seconds that seemed as many minutes to Hazel, as she looked at the face in the glass, Enid just sat there. Then, with a certain resolute hospitality, she rose and turned around.

"Oh," she said. "Miss Dering, isn't it? Won't you sit down?"

If you will pronounce the "oh" with a short e sound in front of it, and inflect the "won't you sit down" with a high stress on the "won't" and a sagging curve on the rest of the sentence to the "down," which had a little upward quirk again, you will get a rough idea of the effect.

It was all Hazel could do to resist saying, "Thanks, awfully," or something fresh like that. But she thought of Keziah and refrained.

"I just"—she began and hesitated, having meant to say, "horned in"; she substituted "butted in" as a concession to conventional English, but stammered over that. "I thought," she concluded, "it was about time we were getting acquainted."

"So glad," said Enid.

That left Hazel stumped and there was a rather ghastly silence for a minute. It was the English girl who broke it with a surprising remark.

"I almost spoke to you," she said. "You're not an American, are you?"

"Surest thing you know!" said Hazel. "What made you think I wasn't?"

"You don't look like one. You look like a—Vienese."

"My father was some sort of wop, all right," said Hazel. "Maybe that's what he was. But it's Georgie Cohan's grand old rag, every time, for mine."

Without understanding a single word of that sentence, Enid knew what she meant. And she pulled another of those "really's!" that had so disconcerted Freddy Boldt.

But Hazel, being a direct young person, incapable of being anything but amused by whatever Miss

Carew-Powell might see fit to think of her, did not retire in disorder, as Freddy had done.

"Was it," she asked coolly, "because you thought I wasn't an American, that you were going to take a chance and speak to me?"

"Oh!" said Enid, with a gasp. "I didn't mean it that way. But, I thought—perhaps, that some one who was a foreigner herself, might—might be willing to meet another foreigner half-way."

"I get you," said Hazel thoughtfully. "You thought—that we Americans had it in for you because—because you were English or something? Thought we were all trying to get your goat?"

"I suppose that is what I mean," said Enid, "yes."

"Look here!" said Hazel. "Have you ever said anything like this to old Keziah—Mrs. Strong, the wardrobe mistress, you know?"

"I have never spoken to her at all," said Enid, "except to say good morning and good night."

Hazel inquired of the universe at large if you could beat that. Then she proceeded to explain; not with her customary fluency, to be sure, because something about the English girl laid a paralyzing hand upon her vocabulary, but not the less—perhaps rather the more—intelligibly, for that what the company had thought about her, and what old Keziah had opined that Enid might be thinking about the company, after which she

reverted once more to the miraculous insight of old Keziah.

"You thought, all of you," questioned Enid incredulously, "that in spite of the awful mess I was making of my part, I still felt—superior?"

Hazel gave a nod. "Especially Freddy Boldt," she said. "He's all cut up about it. Because—well, he's crazy about you, really, and he thinks you don't like him."

"I am English," said Enid, "and perhaps I don't quite understand your American humor . . ."

Hazel interrupted rather breathlessly. It was so unusual for her to find herself getting scared that possibly she didn't recognize the sensation.

"I'm not trying to get funny," she asserted vehemently. "It's true."

"That he admires me as an actress?" questioned Enid incredulously. "That's all you can possibly mean, of course."

"It isn't what I mean though—not exactly. He wants you to make good out in front, and he's all broken up because he thinks you try to snub him and won't let him teach you what he knows, so that you can."

A very faintly satirical smile flashed for an instant over the English girl's face, but Hazel caught it.

"Oh, I know," she said. "You could take him out

and lose him anywhere in the high-brow stuff. But when it comes to getting things across with a bang, right in the middle of the big bell, Freddy's no slouch."

"But does one have to bang the big bell all the time?" said Enid plaintively. "Why can't one just play his part and stay in the picture and . . .?"

"That's it!" said Hazel. "That's what you do. And that's all right if there's any picture to stay in. If it's the kind of piece that people want to think is so, and you're trying to make them think it's so—great! Go ahead your way! But people don't come to the Globe looking for things that are so. They want us to come out and make them forget what's so—make them forget that they're married and that they have to get up and go to work to-morrow at seven fifteen. They want us to shake them up—nudge a laugh out of them. They're our job, not the piece. It's them we've got to work for. We don't have to do it in a roughneck, small-time way like Tom O'Hara. But we've got to do it just the same."

Enid was staring thoughtfully at the litter on her make-up tray and the depth of her abstraction kept her from making any comment on her visitor's speech; so Hazel, like a person who is swimming along and expecting to touch bottom any minute, had just to go on.

"You don't know how to do the things we do," she

said. "But you can do some things that we don't know how to do. I've been watching, and I know. And if you'd just get the trick of doing what we can do, too —gee!"

"But what is it that you do?" said Enid. "*You* don't pretend to recognize people out in the audience, nor start and look surprised when some one laughs in a peculiar way, nor make jokes with the musicians."

"No, that's vaudeville stuff, all right," said Hazel, "and small time, at that, as I said. It isn't so much what you do, it's what you feel. Why, we had an old guy working here in the last piece, and honest, he hadn't a thing left. He couldn't dance any more and he couldn't sing and he never could act. But to him that audience was just a troupe of performing dogs. They had to lie down when he cracked the whip; they had to laugh when he said laugh. And it was all because he felt that way about it. They've got to be right in your hands all the while—something you can do what you like with."

She got up and went over toward the door, just from an automatic signal in her own brain that her entrance cue was coming.

"I'm just a mutt like Freddy," she said. "I don't know any more about the high-brows than he does. But I've got a hunch that they aren't so different as they think they are, from these folks out here. Maybe

they'd like a chance, once in a while, to forget how much they know."

Enid came across rather quickly and stood before her there in the doorway. She hesitated a second, and then held out both hands for Hazel's.

"I wonder if you have any idea," she said, not very evenly, "how kind you have been."

"Oh," said Hazel—the imp, "it isn't me. It's Freddy. I've just been telling you what he's been trying to for a week. Only you've got the Indian sign on him, so he can't. He's scared to death of you, really. That's the truth, you know."

I don't know how actors do this trick. Hazel walked straight down the iron stairs and across the wings and out on the stage, and her cue came—as it should—just a half-second before she appeared. If she had said five more words to Enid, she'd have been late.

All she had time to give Freddy was a meaning sort of nod, as she passed him. But later, out on the stage, just before the finale, when he came on as a real estate agent to try to sell her a camp in the Adirondacks, she turned up-stage long enough to say, "Keziah had the right steer about her, Freddy. She's scared to death of you, but she thinks you're great."

Being an artist, Hazel didn't spoil her effect by trying to lay it on with a trowel. She stopped right where she was. When Freddy demanded to be told

how she knew, expecting a full report of the conversation that had taken place in Enid's dressing-room, she became impregnably uncommunicative, contriving to imply, however, that it was a delicacy about committing a breach of confidence that silenced her. She was one of those rare persons who can enjoy a joke without telling it, so she just watched the poison work, and her blank green eyes conveyed no hint to anybody, except occasionally to Freddy himself, who regarded her with misgivings.

She asked him one day what his system was for taking off weight, saying, with a preposterous assumption of innocence, that she might want to use it herself some day.

He was getting thin. That was no joke. But as Hazel herself was almost as impossibly slender as the hypothetical young ladies you see pictures of nowadays in the fashion magazines, her question was obviously derisive.

Poor Freddy! He was precluded from believing that Hazel was simply stringing him by the indisputable fact that Enid had humbly come to him of her own accord, told him she knew how dreadfully bad she was and asked him for more rehearsals. Freddy —afraid for once in his life of Tom O'Hara, suggested that he would read "Teddy's" lines himself, and set eleven o'clock in the morning, when they could

be sure of having the theater to themselves, except for old Keziah, for the hour.

So they worked away every day. The second or third day, blushing a good deal, he suggested that they lunch together—to talk things over.

It was painfully evident that they hadn't much to talk about, and a book that Enid had with her, lying out on the lunch table, seemed to offer a way of breaking an awkward silence. Freddy wanted to know what it was.

"It's a—why, it's a modern version of the Blue Beard story," said Enid.

He lit up at once. "That ought to be pretty good," he said. "I've been thinking about that myself. Would you mind letting me look it over when you're through with it?"

"I'm through with it now," said Enid, with vigorous cordiality, pressing it upon him. "I'll be awfully interested to see what you think about it." And then, with seeming irrelevance: "I'm an anti-suffragist myself."

Freddy thought it a bit queer, her changing the subject like that, but he quite agreed with her political opinions. Woman's sphere was the home, he thought. There were many facts knocking about the world outside that a good woman oughtn't to know.

Well, he put the book in his pocket—it was a slim

little volume in a green binding—and when he got back to his rooms that night, after the show, he read it—*through*. When he shut it up he definitely believed, for a few minutes, that he had gone mad. He could read. He understood the English language. But there was not one speech, from the beginning to the end of it, that meant anything at all. There were doors that opened by themselves; there were a great many invisible voices wailing unintelligible things; there was a rushing to and fro in subterranean grottoes. Torrents of pearls and diamonds and amethysts burst out of ebony doorways, and beautiful women, with a great deal of hair, went about saying, "Light! Light! More light!" "Oh, the bars rise. They rise!" —things like that. And once, one of them said that her poor bare arms would shake with cold, and another said no, for they were too beautiful. There wasn't a mention of Blue Beard in it from cover to cover, the title being *Ardiane and Barbe Bleue,* and it was written by a guy named Maurice Maeterlinck.

When he met Enid next morning at rehearsal she asked him how he liked it.

"Great!" he said, with a sickly smile. "Immense!"

What else was there that he could say? If she were really as loony as the author of that piece, the only thing was to humor her delusions.

But she was so easily pleased over his verdict, it

went so much further than anything else had, up to now, to break the ice and put him on a friendly footing with her, that he boldly courted disaster and asked for more.

"I haven't anything else of Maeterlinck's with me," said Enid. "Perhaps you could get them at the library."

Freddy said it didn't matter about their being by Maeterlinck—anything she happened to have handy.

So the next volume she brought to lunch with her was a play by Ibsen called *Little Eyolf*.

Freddy had heard of Ibsen all right, and he had to disguise a very genuine shudder when she handed it over to him. The fact that he took it out of his pocket when he got to his room that night and actually started to read it, bespeaks a depth of real devotion that very few knightly deeds could rival.

Up to a certain point, he fared better with it than he had expected. It was all plain as a pike-staff, until suddenly he got to a sentence, spoken by the heroine, too (she must be the heroine. She was the man's wife), a sentence which, if it meant anything at all, meant something so utterly outrageous that—well, a respectable married woman simply couldn't say such a thing.

When Enid, at the lunch table the next day, brought the thing up, quite calmly, for discussion, Freddy went

the color of a well-toned Bokhara rug. Of course it was simply that, in her innocence, she didn't understand. Somebody ought to speak to her about it. She ought to have somebody to look after her—some one wise, strong and—masculine. She ought to have a home where she could be "enshrined"—as they say in *Sappho* and *Romance* and plays like that—"like an altar candle burning." The stage was all right for some women, but Enid . . .

These reflections got to be more or less habitual with Freddy. But at about this point he usually woke up with a jump and came back to the rehearsal. He occasionally told Willy Lord—and more often and more vehemently told himself—that these rehearsals were doing wonders for Enid and that every day marked an improvement of a startling and dramatic extensiveness.

The vehemence of these assertions was due to an incorruptible corner of his mind that declined to fall in love with Enid; which remained simply and brutally a stage manager, and which assured him, in moments when it could make itself heard, that her case was absolutely hopeless. "You don't rehearse her," it said with pungent truth, to Freddy. "She rehearses you. You're afraid to tell her what you make up your mind to every night. You make her a few milk and water suggestions, and she argues you out of those."

Anything that tended to silence this Voice, or to confute what it said, Freddy welcomed with an almost passionate enthusiasm; when, for instance, they started a little ruffle of applause out in front (real applause, I mean. Not usher applause. Any trained ear can tell the difference) after the first stanza of her lyric; and he marked with a red letter, the Tuesday afternoon when a man and a woman in the right-stage box, applauded her enthusiastically.

If only they had been regular people, the Voice would have been left without a word to say. Unhappily, it was able to point out that they were not, being manifestly English. The man gave himself dead away by a stage-property; namely, a monocle, which he wore in his right eye.

Lou Heminway, the press agent, came back quite excited, to tell Freddy that they were Sir Alexander Johnston and his wife who were doing another farewell tour of the States in Shakespearean repertory.

It was all very well for Lou to feel enthusiastic. He constructed an excellent press notice out of it, which appeared in three of the next morning's papers. But Freddy's Voice discounted the episode by saying that they were English and so was Enid, and that to any English person, any other English person was superior to any one else who was not English.

His Voice wasn't alone in saying this, either. Tom

O'Hara and Josephine Foster proclaimed it to the four winds.

The person who gave him the most comfort was Hazel Dering. Hazel, in her inexplicable way, took to sticking around in the first entrance and watching Enid's work, with a kind of catlike—or sphinxlike—alertness.

"Trying to learn a few tricks?" Tom O'Hara asked her one night, as he sat down beside her on the piano lid.

Hazel nodded.

"Good idea!" said Tom. "How not to do everything, eh!"

"All right, Mr. Wiseheimer," said Hazel. "Have it your own way."

Freddy repeated that retort lovingly to himself that night when he went to bed. "But," the Voice demanded with stubborn incredulity, "what the devil *was* Hazel doing?"

Well, it was a pretty hard time. As a system for taking off weight, it worked well enough, but otherwise it was unsatisfactory. And when Willy Lord sent for him one day to come around to the office, it was, paradoxically, a sort of relief to find that his premonition about the cause for this sending was right.

"Cheer up," said the boss. "Here's some good

news for you. Zora Ffoliet turned up last night. Her show was a flivver and she wanted to know if I had anything for her. I slapped a contract down in front of her so quick she jumped. She's too good for Forget-me-not, of course. But, with what we've had for the last month, she'll just about strike an average."

"C-Carew-Powell's improving," said Freddy desperately. "Give her time. . . ."

"Eternity's what she wants," said Willy Lord. "Time wouldn't do her any good—not for us. You've done your damnest, Freddy, I'll say that for you. But you may as well take the count. I've just sent her her notice. She can take her two weeks' pay, but you tell her she can quit to-morrow. Ffoliet'll be able to get up that part overnight."

Freddy blundered out of the office, got his hat and coat from his dressing-room, plodded down the alley to the street, and turned north. Enid's hotel, the Carolina, was pretty well out on the North Side, but as his impulse to go to her was a perfectly simple and unthinking one, and as his mind—or what he supposed was his mind—was very much occupied with a process that he called thinking, he neglected a rank of taxi-cabs and equally ignored the street-cars. He just went along in the shortest practicable line, much as if he had been drawn by a magnet.

He had a vision of her—crying. Crying her heart out. She had worked so hard; she had done, so humbly, her best; she had seemed so wistfully eager for his approval, so happy in the thought that she was getting it. And now, out of the clear sky, the thunderbolt had fallen. The picture became a moving picture as he walked along.

She is all alone in her room in the hotel; the curt notice from the boss is in her hand—crumpled—tear-stained. There comes a knock at the door, and she says, dully, hopelessly, "Come in." The door opens and there, on the threshold, stands her friend, Freddy Boldt. She tries to smile away her tears. "It was kind of you to come," she says. "Come in." "Kind," says Freddy, shutting the door. "I wanted to come. You knew I'd come, didn't you?" She tries to smile away her tears. . . . ("You have said that once before," said the Voice. "Well, can't I say it again?" answered Freddy.) She tries to smile away her tears, but the effort is too great. "I hoped you'd come," she whispers, but her voice is choked with sobs. He comes over to her and lays a comforting hand upon her hair. "I'm such a failure," she says brokenly. "Success isn't everything," says Freddy. "There are better things than success—the love of an honest man who will enshrine you in his heart and keep you there like an altar candle, burning, is better than the hollow ap-

plause of an audience of heartless boneheads." (The Voice objected to boneheads. Thought it wasn't up to the high literary quality of the rest of the scene, but Freddy ignored this criticism.) There is a tense moment of silence. "You've got fine friends with college educations," Freddy goes on, "who can use finer words. I'm just a plain rough man." "Don't say that," whispers Enid. Freddy says it again. "A plain rough man. But I love you, Enid. Will you marry me?" Again she is convulsed with sobs, but her hand reaches out for his. "How can you?" she says. "How can you love me, after that first dreadful day, when I was so—haughty to you?"

"Damn it!" said an innocent bystander, with whom Freddy had collided, in the doorway to the Carolina. "Haven't you any eyes in your head?"

"Dearest, please don't speak of that," says Freddy. "Never think of it again. I've forgotten it. You must forget it, too."

"Miss Carew-Powell?" said the flossy-looking young lady at the telephone board. "Just a minute. I'll see."

"Never," says Enid. "I can never forgive myself. I can only . . ." And then she whispers something that Freddy has to lean very close to hear.

"She says you're to come up," said Flossy.

So Freddy went up in the elevator and knocked at the door.

A voice that was not in the least choked with sobs asked him to come in.

"It's odd, your turning up like this," she said, as she shook hands with him. "I was on the point of telephoning to you. Won't you sit down?"

Freddy was glad to, for his brain was really reeling. There were no tears. There was no damp crumpled notice in her hand. The girl was positively radiant. Freddy saw in a flash what had happened. It was exactly what he would have foreseen, if the interview with Willy Lord had left him with a grain of sense. The notice had not been sent to the hotel at all. It had, of course, been stuck in her mail box at the theater. And now—this was the blow that about finished Freddy—it was up to him to tell her what had happened.

"D-did you get a note?" he stammered, and under her look of inquiry, he mopped his brow with a tightly clenched handkerchief.

"A note?" she asked. "From you?"

"N-no," said Freddy. But he just couldn't tell her it was from the boss, so he stopped there.

"I fancy not," said Enid.

She waited a minute to see if he had anything more to tell her. But, it becoming apparent that he had not, she took mercy on him and explained why she had been about to telephone to him.

"I'm in a bit of a difficulty," she said, "and I want you to tell me what I am to do. Sir Alexander Johnston—(You know who he is, don't you? They were at the theater the other day)—came to see me this morning, and asked me to take a position in his company. It seems that Lady Johnston is threatened with some throat-trouble. They went to see a specialist yesterday who told them that the strain of playing eight times a week would be altogether too much for her. I was with him on a Provincial tour two years ago and—well, he wants me to alternate with her. The difficulty is that they want me to begin at once—right away, as you Americans say. I don't want to do anything to embarrass Mr. Lord, of course. He's been frightfully nice to me. I don't want even to ask him to let me off the customary two weeks, if you think it would put him in a difficulty. But, if it could be managed . . ."

Freddy swallowed hard twice. "Don't you worry," he said. "I'll fix that. Just leave it to me. You play to-night and to-morrow it's all off."

"But are you sure?" questioned Enid. "Can he get some one without any notice at all?"

Freddy swallowed again. "Sure," he said. "Surest thing you know. Don't you worry. Just leave it to me."

He got up, rather precipitately, to go.

"You're awfully kind," said Enid, holding out a hand to him.

And then occurred the only thing that had had a place in Freddy's little scenario—a momentary silence that had—well, really a little tension about it.

How many of the feelings that were boiling away behind his honest, rather inexpressive little mug, were legible to her, I wouldn't undertake to say. But the fact is that after a rather long look, she held out the other hand and gave that to him, too.

"I don't mean just about this," she said. "You may be sure I won't forget."

"G-good-by," said Freddy.

He went back to the theater, took her notice out of the mail box and tore it up. Then, to drown his sorrows—because he was, you mustn't forget, heart-broken—he went resolutely down into Sammy's and ordered a drink.

You might think his Voice would have had the decency to let him alone, for that morning, anyway; but it hadn't. No sooner had he got her image comfortably before him and begun reflecting sadly that by now, with a little better break in the luck, she might have been his, than it spoke up.

"She'd have made you read all the rest of Ibsen's plays, you know," it suggested derisively.

Freddy wriggled and set down his glass.

"And that nut, Maeterlinck's, too—make you talk about 'em, nights—over a cup of tea. . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" said Freddy.

"Yes, sir?" said the waiter.

"Take away the beer," said Freddy, after a silence, "and bring me ham and eggs and a pot of coffee."

HEART OF GOLD

THE thing you need for holding down a job as ticket-seller in a box office is firmness and decision of character. A man comes up to the grilled window and wants a seat in the fourth row for tonight. You spin a stack of tickets under your thumb and extricate one, while he gets his money out. Of course, it isn't in the fourth row, and the moment he looks at it, he will see that it is not, because it is marked N 7 R.

There is no swindle about it, because when he asks you what row it is in, you tell him the thirteenth and, of course, if he shoves it back at you and wants his money, you will give it to him. But if you have executed your part of the transaction with enough assurance—if you have said, "thirteenth" to him in a sufficiently inhuman, detached sort of way, the probability is that he will look at you as if you were an automatic lunch vending machine that had just handed him a ham sandwich, when he thought he was dropping his nickel for a piece of custard pie, and go away puzzled but harmless.

Of course, with regular customers who have learned your name—who shove their money in to you and say, "My regular seat, you know, old man," you can afford to be different—almost human.

But it was not a regular customer at the Globe, who worked his way up to the head of the line at the ticket window at the particular moment when this story begins. Indeed, his preoccupied look suggested that he might not be a customer at all. People sometimes did come up to the box office to see if they could buy a postage-stamp or to inquire the way to LaSalle Street or to ask for a small cash donation. And many people came, asking to be passed into the theater free.

The big, brown-faced, worried-looking young man outside the window didn't precisely suggest any of those inquiries—didn't look like a fool, nor an incompetent, nor a beggar, and not at all like a person who expected to get into a theater without paying. But obviously, he had more than a seat in the fourth row on his mind, and he had got as far as saying, after a momentary hesitation, "Could you tell me . . ." when the man behind the grille cut in with a "One? To-night?" and, assuming the other's silence for assent, snapped out a ticket to him. "One dollar," he concluded.

The big young man outside looked rather confused, cast a panic-stricken glance over the file of people who

awaited their turn, plunged a hand into his pocket, rang a silver dollar on the glass, took his ticket and left the window.

The ticket-seller was aware of him for a while longer, standing about in the lobby in an indecisive sort of way, moving up toward the door now and then, but always shying off before he actually handed in his ticket. He hadn't the air of a person engaged in a struggle with conscience—wanting desperately to go in and equally desperately afraid it was wrong. Neither had he the look of one of those wabbly neurasthenics who never can make up their minds. A rather decisive young man ordinarily, one would have said. Finally, when the ticket-seller was beginning to find the problem really irritating, the brown young man gave up his ticket and went in.

But even when he was fairly planted in his seat—and it was, by the irony of fate, a seat in the fourth row—when the curtain was rung up and the show began, still he refused to act like a regular member of the audience. He paid very little attention to what was happening on the stage except for a look of profound distaste over some of Tom O'Hara's jokes and a deep bronze blush now and then when a section of the chorus came on in costumes that revealed more than they left to the imagination. He scrutinized the audience a good deal, twisting round in his seat in a

way that distinctly irritated his neighbors to right and left. Altogether, it was an inexplicable way of acting in a theater.

"I'd like to know what's the matter with that big guy out there?" Tom O'Hara said to Zora Ffoliet as they made an exit together after one of their scenes. "Did you see him—that big sun-burnt rube with the paper collar?"

"Could I see anything else?" said Zora vindictively. "Ask an artist to work against a thing like that! They ought to give him a free pass to the Salvation Army and send him on his way."

"What sort of looking rube?" Hazel Dering wanted to know. She was having a great time with the title part in this piece; slim, black-haired, green-eyed—an exotic Eastern type, she found no difficulty in looking the dangerous adventuress (with the heart of gold—of course) that her part called for. She hadn't been on yet—was sitting on a property cotton bale which they used in the second act for two ponies, dressed as piccaninnies (that is to say, in brown tights and tunics of bandanna handkerchiefs) to pop out of. As a seat in the wings, it was rather in demand because it was padded.

Hazel didn't succeed in getting much of a description of the offending rube from Tom and Zora. She asked for particulars and they gave her indignation.

A chump like that had no business to come to the theater. He was spoiling the house.

"But what does he look like?" Hazel persisted.

"He looks," said Tom O'Hara, "like a piece of cheese." And with that he stalked off down-stairs and Zora up, to their respective dressing-rooms.

Old George Featherstonhaugh, who was almost as much a fixture at the Globe as Willy Lord himself (in his prime, he had made a specialty of the bass parts in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas; the Colonel in *Patience,* Poo-Bah in *Mikado,* the Sergeant in *The Pirates,* and so on)—George leaned back precariously against the cotton-bale and demanded:

"Why this interest in the appearance of rubes, when you have a better-looking man at your feet?" It was a high bale of cotton and he was at her feet, rather. But he meant no harm. That was old George's way.

"It gives me the Willies every time I hear of one," said Hazel. "I'm worried about old Keziah."

"For Heaven's sake, Hazel, cut it out!" said George Featherstonhaugh. "Worry about somebody else for a change. Worry about me. I need it. I'm getting fat, have you noticed?"

This was jocular. He had weighed two hundred and forty pounds for the last ten years. But it was easy to understand his good-humored impatience.

Keziah Strong was a very well-loved old lady, but

distinctly, so far as he could see, nobody to worry about. She was precious old, of course, and with her white hair and the maze of wrinkles that covered her square, competent, kindly, grandmotherly face, she ought by all the sentimental laws of the fitness of things, to sit by a base-burner, in a white little New England cottage, knitting socks, instead of spending twelve laborious hours a day in a theater, taking care of the costumes. A certain amount of concern for her was natural enough.

But Hazel, as George Featherstonhaugh implied, was inclined to run the thing into the ground. Her attitude toward the old lady was as fiercely protective as that of a hen to its solitary chicken. Woe to the chorus girl who tried to impose on Keziah's good nature, in the way of darning tights, for instance! Hazel had been a chorus girl herself, and there wasn't one of their tricks she didn't know. She had a way of dropping into the wardrobe room two or three times an evening, like a hawk into a flock of sparrows. She was reasonably popular among the ponies and the mediums who average rather ambitious, smart and cleanly in their ways. But among the big, lazy show-girls, she was anathema. (I don't know why smartness and cleanliness and ambition should vary inversely as the size in a chorus, but they do.)

"Put on the reverse English," George advised. "Let Mrs. Strong worry about you."

"What do you mean, worry about me? What's the matter with me?"

The girl had asked the question fiercely. The intensity of the stare her green eyes turned upon the big Englishman's face would have disconcerted most men.

"Well, I worry about you," he said placidly. "You haven't looked right to me this winter. You've had that cold of yours for three months. What do you weigh?"

"A hundred and fourteen."

"In that big fur coat of yours?" he asked.

"None of your business," said Hazel, but she reached over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, Feathers," she went on. "You forget it. I'm all right, see. So don't try to start anything."

"Right-o!" he said, though not very enthusiastically, at the end of a little silence, and he scrambled up with her pretended assistance, to a seat beside her on the property cotton-bale.

"Blaze away," he said puffing. "What's the matter with old Keziah, now?"

"It's her son," said Hazel. "Her boy Newton."

"Well, that's something to worry about all right," George mused, "if he's like some I've known. Why

do you suppose it is that the best kind of people like that—and they don't come any better than old Mrs. Strong—have such rotters for children?"

The girl didn't look at him, but she gave him a friendly little pat on the knee and took up another angle of the subject.

"She's the best there is, all right. You said something then. Look here! What do you know about this? She falls in love with a guy . . ."

"Wait a bit," said George, "old Keziah, you mean?"

"You bet," said Hazel. "Listen. She waited for him fifteen years. They were engaged that long—fell in love when they were kids. His mother—she was a lulu, all right—wanted him to go into a bank. But he decided he ought to go to college and he worked his way through because the old lady wouldn't let him have any money. And then there was a couple of years more when he was studying to be a doctor. He gets through with that, and they are all ready to be married, when his mother gets a stroke, or goes silly, or something, and he has to take care of her. She has a dislike for Keziah and has fits whenever her name's mentioned. The doc's got a brother who did go into the bank, but he digs for Boston, and there is nothing doing for Keziah until the woman dies. But she waits all the time—fifteen years, and then they

get married. They're married just one year and he dies."

George made sympathetic noises preparatory to speech, but Hazel didn't mean to be interrupted just yet.

"No, listen!" she said again. "A month after he dies, she has a kid—this boy Newton of hers. Her husband's left her a house with a pretty good yard around it, and two thousand dollars life insurance. Well, then the brother turns up—the one that lit out to Boston. He's married to a swell dame there and he's got all colors of money, and this is what he says. He says, 'Give us the kid. We haven't any of our own. Without him, you'll get along all right. Ten dollars a month from your insurance, and this house and yard. Think what you'll be doing for the boy. He'll get a swell education, make his friends among the upper classes; all that sort of thing!' And Keziah tells him to go to hell. 'I'll give him as good an education as you can,' she says. 'He's all of his father that I have got left and I'm going to keep him.' So the brother gets sore and goes back to Boston and never lifts a hand for her.

"And Keziah gets up out of bed and goes to work. She's worked ever since. She says this job of hers in the theater's a cinch, and I guess it is to her. Why,

she used to go out sewing, all day, every day, for the other women in the town. And on the side, she ran her house and cooked her meals and took care of that boy of hers—made all his clothes till he was fifteen and kept a garden and raised chickens and a few pigs. She punched in every morning at five A. M., and from then till she hit the hay at ten, she never stopped work. She never touched one cent of that life insurance. That just stayed warm and cozy in the bank, piling up interest.

"Well, and when the kid's twenty years old, she pulls it out of the bank and hands it to him. 'There,' she says, 'that's what your father left to you. You can go to Amherst College where he went and when you get through, you'll have enough left to make a start.' And what does he say? 'I don't want to go to Amherst,' he says. 'I've had enough of this stick-in-the-mud New England. I'm going out West." And she never makes a holler. Gives him the money and lets him go.

"She sticks around for a while all by herself, working away just the same. And then, all at once, she does a get-away. I never asked her why. Something must have happened, you can see that—maybe her neighbors got nosey and found out something the kid had done out West. It must have been something fierce, or she wouldn't have sold her house and her

furniture and come to Chicago all by her blessed old self; never knew a soul here, or thought she didn't—had an idea, she said, of putting an ad in the paper, 'Plain sewing done.' And then—what do you know about this?—just as she gets off the train, she walks right into the boss, there in the station. He's just starting out for the Coast. It seems she knew him when he was a boy. He came from her town himself and he wants to know what she's doing out here and she tells him—asks if she can do any plain sewing for him. And he laughs—can't you hear him?—and gives her a job as wardrobe mistress. She'd never been in a theater before—front or back."

"It would be interesting to know what she thought of us, just at first." George was smiling over the idea. "Some shock, I should say."

"Not a bit," said Hazel. "She's too blessed innocent. Don't you see? She just took us all right in without stopping to ask whether there mightn't be something wrong with us."

She said it a little unevenly. "Gee!" she concluded after a reflective little silence.

"Her kid must be a prize pippin all right," said George Featherstonhaugh, "to let her work like that. What's he doing?"

Something about mining, Hazel thought. Old Keziah wasn't very definite about it.

"Grafting on her all the while, I suppose," George suggested.

"Sure," said Hazel, "though she keeps it dark from me. She never let me know that she sent him a sou. She's a tight old party with her information. Never told me this story, except a teaspoonful at a time—when she thought I needed it, I guess. And I did, all right, you can take it from me."

"You're a good scout, Hazel," he said irrelevantly after a little pause, while the bustling chorus crowded past them on to the stage to work up her entrance cue.

The girl slipped down from her cotton-bale and the next moment, he alighted heavily beside her.

"I don't know," she said, with a worried shake of the head, reverting to the mystery of the boy Newton's occupation and presumptive misdoings. "He's got her goat, all right. She gets a letter every Monday morning and it looks to me as if she was scared. She waits for 'em and she don't open 'em for a while and her old hand shakes so she can hardly do it when she makes up her mind to. And then she presses her old lips together and goes off to the theater and never says a word. But I think she's sort of expecting him to turn up. Every time the door-bell rings or the telephone goes, she gives a jump."

George muscled up a big right arm reflectively. "Well, if he does come," he said, "and starts any

rough stuff, just tip me off, will you? I think I could just about settle the hash of that kind of a Johnny."

"He won't have any hash to settle when I get through with him," said Hazel. And then, mechanically, she uttered the peal of light-hearted laughter that was supposed to prelude her entrance to the stage.

She had no trouble finding the big rube. It would have been impossible to help seeing him. He was so big and so unhappy, he stuck out of the audience like a sore thumb. He was spoiling the house, there was no doubt about it. The chill he radiated for half a dozen seats in each direction, would have been invaluable in a cold-storage plant, but it was a deadly thing in a theater.

But Hazel didn't get indignant about it as Tom and Zora had done. She smiled a little, inside, over the look of cold disapproval with which he regarded her, and when she lighted a cigarette, swung herself up on a table and crossed her legs (as all adventuresses do in all musical comedies) his look of shocked disgust was something she half liked him for.

The reason for this negative equivalent to liking lay in the conviction that had grown up in her mind that he couldn't be the person whom, on Keziah's account, she dreaded. A boy who had cheerfully taken all his mother's earnings and skipped to the West, wouldn't be acting like that. He'd be very dressy,

trying to show his class by sitting in the front row and wig-wagging a date with one of the show-girls.

Really, I think she might have got it a little straighter than that—might have got some inkling of an idea that there was something to be said for the western wanderer—that to be the conventionally dutiful and protective grown-up son to a strong-bodied, iron-willed, independent old lady like Keziah, was no easy job.

Hazel had, of course, no data for his career, after his departure for the West. She had never heard of the Colorado School of Mines, nor of the profession of Mining Engineer. She had read, in *The Telegraph*, all about Walter Scott who came staggering out of Death Valley with a million dollars' worth of nuggets and who tried to blow it all in on the way to New York and back. Consequently, her notion of a miner was of one who lighted dollar cigars with ten-dollar bills, chucked gold pieces to the bell-boys at the Waldorf or the Congress, and to a certain sort of the members of her own profession, represented what they would make a first choice of, if a fairy turned up and offered them three wishes.

This was Hazel's idea of a miner who had struck it. Until he had struck it, he was (see almost any of the western moving-picture films for her authority) a good-hearted vagrant, putting up an ineffectual strug-

gle against temptations of various rather vivid sorts, pan-handling his way about among his contemptuously tolerant comrades and given to sentimental, teary memories (reinforced by looks at an old locket) of a lonely, pathetic, white-haired old mother back in "God's country." She, of course, supposes him dead, and lives, in the shadow of a mortgage, on occasional donations from the kindly villagers. Then just as the mortgage is foreclosed and she is being turned out into the street, a noisy party comes joy-riding by in an automobile and she recognizes her son, who she thinks has forgotten her. It turns out that he has thought her dead, too, and is trying to spend a thousand dollars a day of his newly-acquired wealth to drown his grief. So he begs her forgiveness and takes her to live in a palace.

It had annoyed Hazel a good deal that the story of Keziah and her boy Newton wouldn't work out like that. There was no chance for Newton to present the well-worn excuse, because obviously, he knew all about his mother—where she was, at any rate, and presumably what she was doing, as was proved by the letter from him that came in every Monday morning, with the same smeary Arizona post-mark on it. Why wasn't he adventuring about looking for something? Did he expect a mine to come and climb up into his lap? Well then, what was he doing year after

year? Could it be possible—no, it flatly couldn't—that he had struck it rich already?

Hazel, you see, her mineralogical lore being derived wholly from the movies, had never even heard of the sort of mine that was just a big uncompromising mountain, all seamed and fissured with streaks of green rock that had to be dug and blasted out of it—rock, which when ground and slimed and separated and roasted and smelted, produced copper and silver and lead and zinc and other uninteresting elements in varying proportions to the ton—of a mine that wanted money and patience and hard work and then, insatiably, more money and more patience and more hard work before it even began to yield up its treasure to you.

A mine, to Hazel, was a little pocket in the rock into which the thirst-parched and half delirious prospector reached an emaciated arm and from which he began pulling up irregular nuggets about the size of baseballs, of pure twenty-four-carat gold. The moment before you found it, you were penniless—desperate. The moment after you found it, you were rich beyond the dreams of a stage multimillionaire. One day you were perishing for a crust of bread. The next you were buying an automobile, a racing stable, and a palace on Fifth Avenue.

So obviously Newton hadn't struck it. He wouldn't

be piking around Obelisk, Arizona—or whatever the name of the place was—grafting on his mother, if he had. Presumably, he was too lazy and too worthless to go out into the desert and parch and starve until he found the predestined pocketful of nuggets that Fate had stowed away there for him. And if he came back without having struck it, what would he come for? Why, of course, having got tired of the hardship and the monotony of Obelisk, he hoped to be able to persuade his mother to finance him to some other experiment. There'd be a repentance, of course, and a hard luck story, and then a scientific touch for the old lady's savings—the whole amount, if possible.

At this point in her reflections, Hazel ground her teeth (mentally, that is to say. Actually, she was smiling her most beguiling smile on Tom O'Hara, who played the gilded scion of the Newport society swell—and murmuring seductive nothings in his ear. She had played the part two hundred and twenty-five times, and like the other principals, was safe to go through her lines perfectly, so long as she never stopped to think what she was saying), as I say, she ground her mental teeth and took a vow that the boy Newton shouldn't get away with that project of his, if she could help it. If she just could manage when he turned up to see him before Keziah did, she might contrive to get rid of him altogether.

The big rube out in front gave her a moment of misgiving during the finale to the first act, by reaching down under his seat for his overcoat, indicating thereby that he wasn't going to be in front for the second act. Could he be the boy Newton after all? And was he coming back to see his mother during the intermission? It might be well to play it safe.

She couldn't stand guard over the stage door herself, because she had to dress, but Bill Flynn, the fireman, was a good friend of hers and to him she confided her difficulty.

"Bill," she said, "if a big rube in a paper collar comes around here and asks for Mrs. Strong—see?—nothing doing! Don't call her. Call me."

"I got you," said Bill.

But Hazel had thought of something. "Don't holler out his name," she said. "I don't want Mrs. Strong to know he's here."

"Shoot him?" suggested Bill.

This didn't mean assassination. When you go to the stage door at the Globe and tell Bill Flynn the name of anybody you want to see, he shouts that name in a voice that penetrates to the remotest dressing-room and follows it up with your own. If the distant voice of the object of your visit shouts back, "All right," Bill tells you to wait. And there you stay in the drafty little vestibule until some one comes to rescue you or

until you contract pneumonia and go away. But if the voice says "Shoot him," then Bill, with the utmost cordiality, tells you to come in and directs you to the dressing-room of the person you want.

"Yes," said Hazel after a moment of hesitation, "shoot him along. Better come with him and see he don't get lost. Anyhow, no matter what he says or does, don't let him get a look into the wardrobe room."

Then she flew off and dressed, keeping her kimono handy to dive into in case of the rube. She didn't much expect him—still had a good deal of confidence in her theory that when Keziah's son did turn up, he'd be a very different sort of person. When the intermission passed without any alarms, she considered the incident closed. A blink through the peep-hole in the curtain just before they rang up on the second act showed a vacant seat in the fourth row. Hazel grinned at herself for feeling a little sorry that the rube hadn't stayed long enough to discover that she wasn't really a terrible adventuress, but had a heart of gold after all.

She was not on at rise in the second act, and scuttled into the wing when they rang up, to wait for her cue, which came in three or four minutes. And so completely had her misgiving about old Keziah gone out of her mind that when the stage door into the alley opened behind her, and she heard a man's voice asking Bill, the fireman, if Mrs. Strong was there, she spent

half a second wondering who it could be that wanted old Keziah. Then she flashed around, saw Bill wig-wagging to her and, behind him, in the shadow of the little vestibule, the rube.

II

What Hazel had not calculated upon, you see, was the fact that a man might walk all around the block looking for the right alley to the stage door, and that a man, unaccustomed to such things, with a nightmare fear, after he found the door, that if he opened it, he might come right spang out on the stage in full view of the audience, would hesitate away a good many precious minutes before he actually appeared over Bill Flynn's horizon.

Anyhow, there he was asking for Mrs. Strong. And Hazel's cue came in three minutes! She sprang down the pair of steps that led to the little vestibule and seized the stranger by the arm.

He stared at her in downright horror and turned appealingly to big Bill Flynn.

"It's Mrs. Strong I want," he said. "She's my mother. I want to see her right away."

Bill looked doubtful. The average "John" coming around to the stage door and trying to scrape or claim an acquaintance with a chorus girl, had no chance at all with big Bill. He withered them up

and blew them out into the alley with the mere breath of his scorn. But this sunburnt young man who wanted to see his mother and was, apparently, very much in earnest about it, was another pair of shoes. Why shouldn't he see her? What was Hazel butting in for, anyway?

This train of thought the girl read in a flash. "Come along," she said. "I'll take you to her." And she led the way down the stairs at a pace which left the doubtful and still scandalized rube far behind. "Come along," she called impatiently, and then looked along the passageway to see that the coast was clear. Luckily, the wardrobe room was at the other end and there were no signs of Keziah appearing from it. Her own dressing-room was at this end, the next one off the passage, and she swung the door open and motioned to him to go in.

"Wait here," she said. "I'll call her. She'll be here in a few minutes."

He balked in the doorway. To tell the truth, one couldn't wonder at that. But she gave him a nervous push that sent him in clear of the door and slammed it behind him. Then, two at a time, she took the stairs, and got to the head of them just in time to hear her cue. She was nearly a second late, and Freddy Boldt, over at the O. P. side, was having a fit. She'd have to explain to him later.

She sailed out on to the stage and began giving the audience intimations of the heart of gold that underlay her hard and mercenary exterior. If Newton Strong had been in his seat, out in the fourth row, perhaps he would have been touched.

But, shut up in Hazel's dressing-room down below the stage, he was, I think it is safe to say, the most utterly confounded man at that moment inside the city limits. Twice that evening, since his train had reached Chicago, he had, he would have said, tested his capacity for surprise to the limit. But both times he would have been mistaken.

He had got the first of these staggering surprises when he rang the bell at a little apartment on the North Side and was told by a Swedish maid-of-all-work that Mrs. Strong was at the theater.

Now, they had regarded the theater in East Weston simply as one of the wide-portaled vestibules to hell, and though Newton had more or less shaken off this view—indeed had visited the theater three or four times himself in Denver, still the notion of his mother's going to such a place was received at first with sheer incredulity.

But the callous indifference with which the Swedish maid stuck to her assertion, "Mrs. Strong ban gone to the tayater," was irresistible.

He'd have entertained the suspicion that he hadn't

got the right address, except that a glimpse over the maid's shoulder into the little sitting-room revealed an old red plush photograph album that took him back to East Weston with a poignancy that almost hurt.

"I don't suppose you know what theater?" he said dubiously.

"Ya," said the maid. "Globe Tayater."

She said it with a funny sing-song, and he repeated to make sure he had it right.

"The Globe Theater? Do you know where it is?"

She shook her head with an expression of amiable vacancy, and then, not having the information he wanted, supplied him with something else that would perhaps do just as well.

"Her ban go all tame."

"All the time?" said Newton with a grin. "Do you mean every night?"

She nodded. "Ya," she said.

Of course, that was too ridiculous to pay any attention to. However, it is one thing to shake your head when a fly buzzes in your ear, and another thing to get rid of the insect. The buzzing continued all the way down-town and it connected itself in his mind with occasional passages in her letters that he hadn't been able to understand—lapses, apparently, into a slang the source of which he couldn't imagine.

The posters in the lobby made it difficult to believe

that his mother had selected this as a place of entertainment. The only alternative was that she was employed here in some capacity or other. It was equally impossible either way. He thought out his question to the ticket-seller rather carefully in advance, but, as you know, the ticket-seller didn't give him a chance to ask it and he went inside simply because he didn't know what else to do. The fact that no one was buying tickets when he went out into the lobby at the end of the first act, encouraged him to try again.

"Could you tell me where I could find Mrs. Strong?" he asked.

"Stage door," said the man inside, without losing count of a stack of tickets.

So Newton, hardly believing his senses, explored the alleys of the neighborhood, found the stage door, found big Bill Flynn, was set upon, seized and kidnapped by the daring adventuress he had seen on the stage, and was now shut up—for what purpose he could hardly surmise—in the adventuress' dressing-room.

To Newton, that eight-by-seven dressing-room was the most starkly, shamelessly immoral place he had ever found himself in. Hanging from hooks, thrown over backs of chairs, lying about everywhere, were articles of feminine apparel—garments that had been taken off, garments that were about to be put on—

things that were intended to meet the eye, and things that obviously were not—things that he as a modest young bachelor, was ashamed to look at. And not a rag among them all—for his eye missed a hook in the corner—that a decent, self-respecting woman would wear.

A good-sized mirror was set upon the shelf at the end of the room, with a border of glaring electric lights around it and occupying the rest of the shelf was a litter of articles whose uses he did not at all understand, but which somehow signified the intimacies of feminine adornment. Pervading the whole place—and whether it came from the bright pink sticks and crayons and boxes of powder on the shelf or from the clothes, he did not know—was a perfume. He had never heard of an odor called Bouquet du Diable. But if he had, he would have felt no hesitation in asserting that this was it.

And this was the place where he was to wait for his mother. There was something crooked about it, surely. There would have been ample time to call her, if that had been truly the purpose of the cyclonic and garishly dressed young lady who had thrust him in here. He hadn't heard her turn the key in the lock, though. He went over and tried the door. Yes, it opened all right. And this fact reconciled him to waiting quietly for a few minutes more.

Presently he heard steps come thumping down the stairs. There was a rustle of many persons passing in the corridor. Perhaps his mother was out there now. At any rate, there would be some one he could ask to find her for him.

He pulled the door wide open and started out. Then, with a quickness which a western gun-fighter would have envied him, he sprang back into the comparative security of the dressing-room and slammed the door shut again.

You see, he had unfortunately chosen the moment of what is known as a quick change for the chorus, for making his escape.

In the ordinary course of things when a chorus girl changes one of her scanty costumes for another, she gets the new one off its hook where it hangs in a rack along the corridor, takes it to her dressing-room, takes off her old costume, puts on her new one, and comes out dressed, except for a V-shaped gap down the back, which the wardrobe mistress, or one of her assistants, hooks up. But when the time allowed for the change is only a matter of three or four minutes, she gets out of her old costume while she is running down the stairs, grabs her new one off the hook, and plunges into it in any vacant spot that happens to be handy much as a fireman jumps into his boots. The consequence is that what she wears going down the

corridor is merely the irreducible minimum which never comes off from the moment when she gets rid of her street clothes, until the time when she puts them on again.

It is a very small minimum, really, and to the panic-stricken eye of one unaccustomed to such matters, may easily appear to be less than it is.

For about a fifth of a second, Newton looked. After that, nothing but an earthquake or a fire would have got him out of that dressing-room, except under escort.

Perhaps I shouldn't have said "unfortunately," since it was to this fact that Hazel owed it that she found him there ten minutes later.

She opened the door bruskly, shut it behind her with a bang and leaned back against it.

"Anybody been in here?" she wanted to know.

He made no answer, just stared.

It was his first good look at her, close to. He had seen painted women before, on the streets of Denver and Obelisk, and he had often wondered that the brazen artifice of such a method of decoration should appeal to any one not absolutely blind drunk. But never in his life had he seen any one so flagrantly, so shamelessly painted as this girl who stood guarding the door of her dressing-room against his escape. Her eyelashes were gummed thick with blacking, and the lids were penciled blue. And the paint, the powder

and the rouge challenged inspection quite without subterfuge. As he looked at her and from her to her surroundings the explanation that he was dreaming occurred to Newton as a probable one. The whole situation was simply too grotesque to be true.

The girl had waited a minute for an answer to her first question. Now, assuming from his silence that he had not succeeded in finding a messenger, she asked another question.

"What did you come here for?"

"They told me my m-mother was here," he said. "Mrs. Strong. I don't believe it's true. Maybe it's a mistake. But I was in a hurry to see her, so I came."

"She's here, all right," said Hazel, after deciding that it wasn't worth while to try to lie about it. "But you aren't going to see her if I can help it. You're going to see me instead. I'm Hazel Dering. Maybe your mother's written to you about me."

His jaw dropped at that in blank incredulity. The Miss Dering of his mother's letters who was so kind and clever and who worked so hard that his mother worried about her, turning out to be a shameless bedizened hussy like this! Her announced intention to prevent his seeing his mother faded into the background beside so glaring an impossibility.

She glanced up toward the ceiling where a thumping overhead told her how much time she had left for the

interview. Then determined to waste none of it, getting as straight to the point as she could—and that was very straight, indeed—she sailed in.

"She's told me about you, all right. You don't need to tell me what you came on here for. You couldn't graft it from her fast enough, out there in Arizona, so you came along to make a straight touch. Maybe it's none of my business, but old Keziah's a pal of mine and right here's where I butt in and say nix. She's an old lady, and she works twelve hours a day for her little old thirty a week—and she's going to keep it. See! No Rathskeller rube is going to separate her from it while I'm right-side-up, with care. Do you get that?"

Newton opened his mouth and drew in his breath preparatory to speech. But the thumping overhead had stopped, and the girl knew her time was getting short.

"Now keep your hair on," she admonished him, "and listen. I don't know what the regular ante was, but if old Keziah could stand it, I guess I can."

She hadn't been looking at him while she said it. Any one who knew Hazel well, if he could have seen her and heard her just then, would have found her manner a little odd. It was an inveterate habit of hers to dress her occasional altruistic acts in a disguise of selfish considerations. She was always to-

ward her own more romantic impulses a bit of a cynic. The proposition she had now to make to the rube in its naked kindness and affection for her old friend Keziah, troubled her modesty as one of her own costumes would have troubled that of a débutante.

"I'm no Sarah Bernhardt nor Eva Tanguay nor anybody like that," she said, "but I guess I can see old Keziah's ante, all right. Tell me how much you get from her, and I'll pay it regular. And I'll stand the car-fare back to Arizona, if you'll hit the rattler to-night. You play it square with me, and I'll play square with you. You write her a letter, when you get back, and tell her you've got a job, and I'll slip the coin to you once a week—see. Does that go?"

Overhead, the ponies were doing the third encore to their specialty, and she had to come strolling on left as they bounced off right. She ought to be in the wings this minute. She left the door and strode up nearer to him.

"Does it go?" she repeated insistently. "Speak up."

But before he could speak, the unguarded door swung open behind her and the look in the rube's face made her turn around.

"Mother!" he said.

Old Keziah just looked at him and her face went white. Her competent, strong old hands went out fumblingly—tremblingly for a chair.

Hazel was quick, but the rube was quicker. Before she could sweep away the cumber of things on a chair, he had caught the old lady in his arms.

"Keep your mouth shut about that," said Hazel in a last frantic whisper, "and it goes."

She bolted from the room again and fled up the iron stair, catching her cue and a glimpse of Freddy Boldt's distracted face at the same moment.

When she came off at the end of her scene, Freddy was the first person she encountered in the wings and she was prepared to be properly explanatory and apologetic. A stage wait of one second is long enough to chill an audience and is an excuse for heart-failure on the part of the stage manager.

To Hazel's amazement, it appeared from Freddy's manner that his own anxiety was to reassure her.

"The old lady's all right," he said. "It wasn't anything serious that happened to her. The rube's taken her home, but she'll be all right in the morning."

I'm afraid that Hazel's expression of her annoyance over this unforeseen turn of affairs would not meet the approval of any writer, however liberal, of a book on etiquette. Freddy didn't approve of it either. He had done, according to his lights, a friendly act in letting the old lady go home in the middle of the performance.

But there wasn't time to tell Freddy the whole

story as she had confided it to George Featherstonhaugh earlier in the evening, so she allowed his natural, though rather profane inquiry as to what was eating her, to go unanswered.

It was hard luck, though, and no mistake. The rube would have a clear two hours with his mother, in which to tell his sob story and make his touch before Hazel could possibly interfere again. Probably he wouldn't waste a minute of it, either, now that her own declaration of war upon him had given him such ample warning. She thought a little of telling George Featherstonhaugh what had happened and getting him to go home with her, George's remark, accompanied by a muscling up of a big right arm, about settling the hash of that particular Johnny, recurring pleasantly to her mind. But it was hard to see, on reflection, how an appeal to force would settle matters. The rube couldn't be beaten up in his mother's apartment, and under her eye. And anyway, Hazel doubted a little if George, with the best intentions in the world, were the man to do it. The rube was almost as big as he was and with a lean, hard, dangerous quickness, that recalled to the girl's mind a phrase about being able to lick one's weight in wild-cats. No, all there was for her to do was to dress as fast as she could after the show, go home in a taxi and hope she wouldn't be too late.

The light which shone through the transom over the door into their little sitting-room was an encouraging augury, as she came panting up the stairs. But the absence of voices as she felt for her key (she had decided to let herself in rather than ring) told in the opposite direction. And when she quietly swung the door open and stepped inside, she saw that she was too late, just as she had expected to be. Old Keziah, in a rocking chair by the window, was alone in the room and the look of troubled perplexity in the kind old face, shot a hot stab of anger through the girl's mind.

She closed the door quickly and paused a minute to get her breath.

"Well," she asked at last, her voice harsh with eagerness, "did you fall for it? Are you going to do what he wanted you to?"

"I don't know," said old Keziah. "I'm tryin' to figger it out. He's comin' back in the morning'—to breakfast. I'm a-goin' to tell him then."

III

Hazel went over to a little clothes cupboard, and pretty deliberately took off her hat and the big fur coat that brought her weight up to one hundred and fourteen pounds.

She was in time, then, after all. The rube hadn't got away yet with all of his mother's savings in his pocket. But the girl knew she must be careful. It wouldn't do to make any mistakes in trying to dissuade Keziah from doing what her "boy," with tears in his voice, probably, had begged her to. A wrongly chosen word might spoil everything.

She was still half-buried in the shallow little cupboard, replacing her hatpins, with minute accuracy, in the holes they had come out of, when she heard the old lady getting up, rather creakingly, from her rocker.

"I guess we may as well be goin' to bed, both of us," she said, as Hazel faced around. "There's nothin' like a night's sleep for settlin' yer mind. And mine cert'nly needs settlin', after what I've been through to-night."

They had lived together a year, with perhaps the nearest approach to intimacy that was possible to either of them. Both were reserved to an extraordinary degree. But here was where the difference came in. The girl—buffeted, cheated, tricked by the world—grown out of all her illusions, and most of her faiths, before she was well into her teens, had cultivated and developed the blank impenetrable reserve which she wore before the world, as a defensive armor. She could have understood that in the older woman.

But the sight of the old lady, beaming trust and confidence and affection upon her through her big

iron-bowed spectacles, and yet carrying off her troublesome problem to bed with her, all alone, without a word, seemed to the girl almost unendurably pathetic. It made her throat tighten and her eyes blur.

Keziah saw the brightness in the girl's green eyes, and the troubled, thoughtful look in her face gave way to her old benignant smile.

"Don't you fret about it, child," she said.

"Look here!" said Hazel. "Perhaps you're right about a night's sleep. But, in the morning, when he comes back, and you talk things over with him, I want to sit in—see?"

"I don't see as it would harm any," said Keziah. "Though there ain't a mite of need of it. The boy's made a mistake, but he'll understand better in the mornin', too."

This was a little puzzling, and Hazel was still frowning over the meaning of it, when the old lady stopped half-way down the passage to her bedroom, hesitated like one in a difficulty, and then said something more puzzling still.

"Mebbe—mebbe in the morning, if you was to dress fer goin' out, in your reg-lar street clothes, it'd help him to get over his mistake."

Hazel wrestled with that remark for a while after she went to bed. Had she got any clue at all to its meaning, she might have lain awake a long while over

it. But, as she could make nothing of it whatever, she fell, presently, asleep.

The next thing she knew—somewhere along in the middle of the night, the door-bell was ringing. Because, if your regular hours for sleep are from two to ten, half-past seven A. M. is the middle of the night, just about.

Hazel slept on a couch in the sitting-room, preferring it to the tiny little box, with a window in the light shaft, that offered the only alternative. Her reaction to the thrill of the bell was purely galvanic. She wasn't awake at all, really, when she sprang out of bed, groped for the sleeves of her heavy quilted dressing-gown, and poked her feet into her fleece-lined slippers. The bell was probably a mistake. Or it might be a telegram, or a special delivery letter, and the more expeditiously she disposed of it, the sooner she could be back in bed again, sleeping in the normal, horizontal position. She wouldn't have stopped for the dressing-gown and slippers, except that the doctor had advised her to sleep with the windows wide open, and the room was cold.

Consequently, when she pulled the door open, and found herself confronting Newton Strong, it took her the better part of a minute to get her mental eyes open. During that time, she simply stared at him. And he, with a difference, stared back at her.

this pale, slim young girl, with her black hair done in two thick braids and her sleepy eyes staring at him. A woman always looks younger, or else a great deal older than her age, when you see her that way, with her hair hanging and in heelless slippers. And Hazel had not reached the age yet, where the candor of such a revelation made her look old. And then, last night's make-up never entirely came off until she had washed her face in the morning, and the imperceptible residuum of it gave her skin the bloom of a child's. Indeed, it was for a child that Newton at first took her.

"My m-mother," he stammered, "Mrs. Strong, asked me to come to breakfast."

"Breakfast!" said Hazel, shivering with the cold and with the effort to wake herself up. "Oh—yes. Come in."

It was not until she had closed the door behind him that he knew her.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you . . .!"

But she interrupted him with a quick little gesture toward his mother's bedroom, up the hall.

"She's asleep yet," she whispered.

The rube took this admonition with a little gasp. Then, still staring at her, he began to flush deeper and deeper. Presently he turned away and looked out of the window.

"You might shut it," suggested Hazel; "the room will get warm quicker," and she paddled across and closed the other one. The maneuver gave her time to think, and she felt she needed it.

Obviously, here was a providential chance to intervene once more in old Keziah's defense and finish up what she had begun last night in her dressing-room. Only, somehow, as she looked at the rube this morning, in the light of day, as he stood there now at the window, painfully embarrassed, turning his soft wide-brimmed hat round and round in his hands, the line she had taken with him last night seemed hardly applicable.

Perhaps it wouldn't have seemed applicable last night if she'd had time really to look at him then. She had been so hurried and so anxious that she had made her proposition rather to the image of Keziah's son, which she had been carrying in her mind for such a long time, than to the man who had stood before her. He didn't look like a regular grafter; no more, really, than Keziah did herself. There was a look of innocence about him that reminded her of Keziah—a look of competence, too. Perhaps he really had played in hard luck. Perhaps he hadn't understood fully what his mother's situation was or how hard she had to work for her thirty a week. The old lady—this was rather a startling thought—might have been as reti-

cent about her affairs with him as she had been, all the past year, with Hazel.

"Look here!" she said, moving a little away from the window and leaning back against the radiator. "The old lady'll be coming out soon, but let's you and I have a little chin first—try to get things straight. That was pretty rough stuff I handed you last night, but that was just because I thought she was getting the worst of it. Maybe I butted in without knowing what I was talking about. Things like that have been known to happen. Take off your overcoat and sit down and deal it out to me straight."

He stammered out a "Thank you," and began unbuttoning his coat. But after he had taken one brief and rather panicky look at her—a look which somehow included the disheveled bed she had so recently sprung out of—his eyes once more sought refuge in the blank front of the apartment-house across the street.

And Hazel—Freddy Boldt wouldn't believe this, but it is true just the same—Hazel, after a puzzled frown that lasted half a second, began to blush herself. That last incomprehensible suggestion of Keziah's the night before recurred to her.

"I'll—I'll go and dress first," she said. She turned up the blankets on the couch and drew the blue and red striped cover which disguised its functions by day over it before she left the room.

As she closed the door between them she apostrophized it, half-way between mirth and indignation.

"Now what," she inquired, "what do you know about that?" A notion occurred to her that brought her color flaming up higher than ever. If he were shocked and embarrassed by her appearance this morning, in a heavily quilted, blue silk dressing-gown which, for warmth, closed tightly under her chin and reached clear to the floor, what must he have thought of her last night?

The rube himself, meanwhile, on his side of the door, made no remarks, but the shock to a number of his preconceived ideas went a good deal deeper. The first of these shocks had come with his identification of the pale, slim young girl in the dressing-gown with the painted baggage who had abducted him the night before in the theater. Paint on a face had always represented to him simply the black flag of feminine piracy, flaunted shamelessly from the mast, in order that all might understand and that no mistakes might be made. Also, it was worn, he supposed, to conceal the ravages of age and wickedness. Under the paint which gave that wicked adventuress whatever charms she had he had assumed a perfect hag. But the vision in the blue dressing-gown had looked to Newton (I am giving away a secret, but you may as well know it now as later) like an angel.

He was one of those simple persons—certainly with regard to women—who make the world simple. The celebrated little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead is to people of this sort the prototype of all women. If they are good at all, they're very, very good, and if they are bad their horridness is simply unspeakable and unspoken of. Clearly, Hazel, with that childlike look of innocence on her and that unmistakably authentic concern for his mother's welfare, was not the vampire he had mistaken her for. And if a girl as pretty as Hazel was not a vampire, then an angel was all there was left for her to be.

But, on the other hand, she was certainly an actress—an actress who played the part of a grossly mercenary adventuress, who smoked cigarettes and sat on a table and crossed her legs and wore clothes that . . .

The thought of those clothes that he had seen upon her person and littered about her dressing-room gave him a twinge of misgiving that hurt horribly. Certainly it was all very puzzling.

The other side of the door Hazel was dressing as fast as she could and thinking as fast as she dressed. She was a pretty wise young lady, and one of her shrewd observations upon life was the fact that you weren't very likely to get the whole truth out of anybody by sitting down blankly in front of him and ask-

ing him to tell you about himself, even supposing him to be willing to tell you the whole unvarnished truth—which was some supposition to begin with. The genuine revelations that you got out of people began when they had, as nearly as might be, forgotten all about themselves.

But before she had buttoned the last button in her sober little dark blue silk blouse she had hit upon an idea for giving Newton something else to think about than the story he was probably, at this moment, engaged in framing up.

As she came blinking sleepily out of her little dressing-room she glanced at the tiny watch in the bracelet on her wrist.

"Gee!" she said. "I don't believe I was ever awake at this time of day before. Look here! There's no use waiting for the Svenske. She don't come till ten o'clock. Let's go out in the kitchen and bubble up the Mocha for ourselves."

The scene, though, didn't work out as she had expected. It flew the track right at the beginning when Newton exhibited a culinary technique so far superior to Hazel's that in five minutes it was he who was getting the breakfast while she flitted about the kitchen and tried to keep out of the way.

"I think I'd know this was my mother's kitchen," he had observed almost as soon as he had taken a look

around. "Though it isn't much like the one we had back home."

But there must have been something homelike about it, because, except for occasional moments when he met her eye and the old paralysis returned, he ceased to be the blushing, uncomfortable, tongue-tied creature of her earlier experiences with him. Except for the fact that he didn't talk like a rube he reminded her of old Keziah more than ever.

"Did you learn to cook out West?" she asked, and he laughed outright at the question.

"No," he said. "I'm a regular cook. My mother taught me when I was a kid. She used to say I was about as good as she was. But I guess that was parental pride. But in the winter when outdoor chores were slack she and I spelled each other off in the kitchen, week by week. It never did any good, though. She always found something else to work at. If it wasn't her own work, it was somebody else's."

He looked around at the girl just then and caught the little confirmatory nod which she gave this statement.

"She's still like that?" he asked.

Hazel nodded again and the look of worried perplexity that came into his face opened the sluice-gates. She set down the coffee-pot, crossed the little kitchen and confronted him.

"Look here!" she said. "I had a bum steer last night, but what I said goes just the same. I know how you feel about it. I've been up against it myself. I'm in luck—just now"—the doctor she went to see every week would have understood the way her lips twitched into an ironic smile over that, but Newton hadn't the data—"and it's your mother I owe it to. If it hadn't been for her . . . Well, I owe her a lot. Not money, but other ways. I'd like to get square—see! So you tell her you're all right—don't need any more—help, and let me stake you on the quiet."

He regularly jumped at that, but his gasp gave her time to go on with a rush.

"It's just a loan, of course. You will be on the easy side of the street pretty soon, and then you can pay it back. It's likely"—that same ironic smile twitched her lips again—"that I'll need it more then than I do now. So, you see, it's a favor to me, too. Keep me from blowing it in."

He turned away from her rather suddenly and she saw him shut his hands tight and draw a long breath.

"All right," she concluded encouragingly; "think it over."

"Was that . . ." he asked, still without looking around at her. "Was that what you meant last night?"

"Oh, forget last night! I had a bum steer, I tell

you, and I was sore. The proposition was the same, only—well, this morning I'd like to shake hands on it."

Newton might have said, "Forget the proposition, but shake hands anyway." That represented more or less what was in his mind. But he had never talked with an angel before, and his thoughts were whirling too fast for any one of them to find an outlet. The beauty—the innocence of her, in her little blue skirt and blouse—her warm-hearted affection for his mother and her kindness for him—the loyalty of her! What a pal she would make! Suppose a miracle should happen, and she . . .

So he didn't say a word. Just stood there staring at her until, with a shrug, she turned away.

"I suppose you're sore now," she said, "because of last night."

That stung him to speech.

"Sore?" he said. "Because—because you tried to protect my mother from a—grafter? Of course that's what you thought me. I can see it plain enough. A man must seem pretty worthless who'd let his old mother work like that. And then, I suppose you knew about her sending me money. She did. Every time I sent her any she sent it back."

The color came flushing up again into the girl's cheeks. Really, it's a shame that Freddy Boldt and

George Featherstonhaugh couldn't have been there to see.

"I didn't even know," she said a little unevenly, "about her sending the money to you. Only she seemed so worried about you and so scared every Monday morning while she waited for your letter to come . . ."

He looked a little puzzled at that, and then he smiled.

"I suppose she began worrying," he said, "when I began threatening to come out here to see for myself what she was doing and why she'd come. Why she'd left East Weston, you know."

Hazel stared at that.

"Don't you know why she left East Weston?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I tried to get it out of her last night, but I couldn't. I wish you'd tell me."

"You can search me," said Hazel. "I thought . . ." And then she floundered, because she was through the ice again. What was worse, her confusion gave him a hint.

"You thought it had something to do with me? That I'd—disgraced her some way? Oh, please don't mind! Of course that's what you thought. Anybody would have."

But this was rather too easy a view for the girl to

take. She had made the sort of mistake that always exasperated her when other people made it.

"My middle name was Wiseheimer that time, all right," she said disgustedly. "Only—well, there's one thing I don't see. What was it threw the scare into old K . . . into your mother? Why didn't she want you to come?"

Seldom has the shoe of embarrassment changed feet more abruptly than it did at Hazel's question. The rube turned the unlovely color of an American Beauty rose.

"My m-mother had never t-told me what she was doing out here," he stammered. "She was afraid to tell me for f-fear I'd be shocked about the theater, you know. And—well," he laughed unhappily, "I guess I was, all right."

The very desperateness of his embarrassment forced him to turn and meet her eyes.

"You see," he said, " I made a much worse mistake about you than you did about me."

The girl returned his look thoughtfully.

"How do you know," she asked, "that it was a mistake you made about me?"

"I've seen you and talked with you," he said simply.

"You didn't like me last night," she persisted, smiling a little, "when I came out on the stage and lighted that cigarette."

"I'm not talking about the theater," he interrupted bruskly. "I'm talking about you. I know what you are—the *real* you. If there are things you do and say there that I don't—like, I guess that's because . . ." Embarrassment was simply burning him up and he was stumbling fearfully. But he plodded on through and managed to get it out. "Because—well, maybe you don't just understand what they mean — how they'd be taken by men, you know."

At first the only expression in the girl's face was a puzzled pucker between her fine brows. Then, as she got his meaning, her eyes widened and she turned suddenly away from him with what started out to be a laugh, but didn't end exactly that way. Really, it didn't sound to Newton like a laugh at all.

"Oh, please!" he cried. "I only said it because I had to. I wouldn't have hurt you for — anything. Last night, in your dressing-room, I was sort of rattled, or I might have understood then—what you really were, you know. You can be sure I understand now."

"You didn't hurt me," she said, and when she turned back to him there was a smile, albeit a rather ragged one, on her lips.

"I understand you, all right," she went on. "But you wouldn't understand any one like me in a thousand years."

The sort of breakfast that Hazel had had in mind

when she suggested that they go out into the kitchen and get it for themselves, would have been done long ago. But Newton, without asking any questions, except where a few things were, had laid the foundation for the meal on a much larger scale. If anybody had offered him a cup of black coffee and a slice of toast and told him it was breakfast his feelings would have been hurt. He had something in the oven now, compounded principally of flour and lard. The girl had watched the mixing process with the fascination of horror, and she didn't know yet what it was going to turn out to be.

He seemed to have no misgivings on the subject. Anyhow, he had been busy with the oven door when Hazel had said he wouldn't understand any one like her in a thousand years, and he had ignored the remark. Perhaps he hadn't heard it. He just produced a pan of baking powder biscuits like a prestidigitator, and announced that breakfast was ready.

"Mother's changed in one thing," he observed. "She'd never have slept through all this."

Hazel thought it was a bit queer herself. But she had one more mystery to solve, and she meant, if possible, to accomplish this before the old lady appeared. So she presented the first explanation that came to hand.

"It's only half past eight, and she doesn't wake up,

usually, for another half hour. There's a lot in what you're used to."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "I guess that's so." And what he was thinking of was revealed the next minute, when he added: "I wish you'd tell me about the theater—about what your work is and all."

"Do you mean your mother's?" she asked.

He flushed a little. "Yes, and—yours," he said. "It seemed horrible to me last night. But I suppose" . . .

"Oh, it isn't so bad," she said. "Not if you're lucky and have a place like the Globe to work in."

He stared a little at that, wondering, if the Globe were a good place, what the others must be like.

"You've got a chance for good steady work in a show like Willy Lord's," she explained. "The trouble with the profession is the ups and downs. You make a hit in something and draw down a hundred a week for a while, and then you get a contract for a new show at one fifty and the new show's a bloomer, and the notice goes up, and there you are flat. Maybe you don't get another look-in for six months. You can't go back in the chorus and you've got to keep up a front. And then if anything happens to you, if—" she hesitated, but went steadily on—"if you get sick or anything, why—it's all off."

Newton hadn't the data that the doctor, or even

George Featherstonhaugh, possessed, but his intuitive faculties were as good as old Keziah's, and the steady look he gave the girl across the table made her change the subject quickly.

"Of course it's different with your mother," she said. "She don't get paid as much as we do and she has to work harder. She's at the theater every day by noon, whether there's a matinée or not, and she never gets back here before midnight. But she gets paid for all the time she works and she'll always have a job as long as Willy Lord has a show to his back. But it isn't a soft thing—not so you'd notice it."

Newton set down his coffee-cup and clasped his hands under the table.

"I wish I could take you out of it, too," he blurted out.

The sparkle that had been in the girl's eyes and the faint flush that had colored her cheeks, faded and died. She set down her coffee-cup, too, so suddenly that it clattered.

"Too?" she repeated stiffly.

"I came on to get her, you see—to take her back West with me. When I found out last night where she was and what she was doing I told her I wanted her to pack up and come with me this morning. She said she'd tell me at breakfast time. But—but I wish you could come with us."

Well, there was the answer to Hazel's unasked question. Since it wasn't money, what was it the rube had asked of old Keziah that had left that troubled look in the old lady's face last night? It was the most natural thing in the world. He wanted her to quit working twelve hours a day and go out West with him and be taken care of as a mother should be taken care of by her grown-up son.

The girl's sensation under the impact of this idea was one common enough in dreams. It was what an aviator must feel when a stay snaps and his planes begin buckling and the long plunge begins, but not very fast at first. She had been aware for weeks that what held her up was nothing but the strength—the inexhaustible vitality of the iron-willed old lady who took her days so competently, one at a time—who never flagged, never let go, never sentimentalized or made a fuss, but was always there when she was needed, with that benignant smile of hers and those big, competent, motherly hands.

Hazel had never told her so. It wasn't the sort of thing you could tell Keziah. She hadn't told her, either, about those weekly visits to the doctor. What was the use?

Hazel was, like most followers of the hazardous professions, a thoroughgoing and thoroughly unconscious fatalist. She couldn't have described herself

by that term, but she couldn't act, in matters that concerned herself, upon any other hypothesis. The doctor's suggestions were not impracticable. Thanks to old Keziah, she had saved up money enough to take the year's rest he ordered in the climate he specified. And if that didn't do the trick she might find something to do in her own profession out in some place like Colorado Springs. Willy Lord would have plenty of suggestions along that line if she should ask him.

But active resistance was paralyzed by the profound belief that you couldn't side-step what was coming to you. The streak of good luck that had begun with her friendship with old Keziah hadn't resulted from any effort of hers. It had begun, in fact, through the throwing away of what looked like the best chance. The luck had gone on getting better and better so fast that it almost frightened the girl. And then, right in the full tide of it, had come a twitch of the string—the warning catch in her breathing that had sent her to the doctor's office. She had smiled over the doctor's verdict—a smile appreciative of the perfect irony of the thing. Fate must have its little jokes, and this time the joke was on her.

But she couldn't take this last blow like that. In sending this big bronzed innocent, with strength and power and confidence simply singing in him, to take

her one support away from her, Fate wasn't playing fair. There was an intolerable wrench about it that couldn't be met with a smile.

She didn't think it out. She was not thinking at all as, with a clatter, she set down her coffee-cup and gripped the sides of her chair to resist an actual vertigo. The things I have been telling you were just the ingredients for the explosion.

But you will understand why she did not grasp at once what it was that he had actually said—that he would like to take her out West, too. It wasn't until he repeated it that it began to reach her mind at all. When it did, it struck her as almost grotesque.

The conventionally well-bred, "nice" girl wouldn't have taken it in quite that way. Because the cornerstone of a "nice" girl's good breeding is the axiom that the world owes her a living. From the cradle to the grave it is somebody's job to take care of her. The only way she can forfeit this right is to stop being "nice."

But Hazel was not a "nice" girl and she had never found any disposition on the part of anybody to take care of her, except for value—of one sort or another—received. One could pay her way by this means or by that. For one of these means—the easiest, perhaps—she had a very profound contempt.

In what capacity did Newton mean that she should

go out West with his mother? That question, which flashed into her mind as soon as she had fairly heard him say he wished she could come, would have brought a smile to her lips if she could have smiled at anything just then. She had been invited to take trips before, to California and Florida, and places like that. The contrast between the givers of these other invitations and the big man across the table from her now, with that look of troubled concern in his face, should have been funny enough for anybody.

She hadn't said a word yet since Newton had told her what he wanted of his mother. It seemed hours already. She tried to speak now, but couldn't.

He waited a moment—it wasn't more than that, really — then looked away from her and went on talking.

"It isn't much of a place, yet, to live in—just a galvanized iron shed. But it wouldn't take long to build some sort of a house and get things fixed up a little, and it's a wonderful country—with the mountains all around, and the finest air you ever breathed. I'm not much at descriptions. You'll have to come out and see it for yourself." Now he looked around at her again. "It's better than this," he said.

"I guess that's right," she managed to answer. But her eyes fell away from his and she made a pretense at going on with her breakfast.

She had seen something in that last look that showed her a way out—an alternative to letting old Keziah go and fighting her hopeless battle alone. Newton might be a rube, and the old-fashioned cut of his collar was enough to have justified Tom O'Hara in calling it a paper one. And he mightn't be so very prosperous now. But there could be no doubt, looking at him, that he was going to succeed. He had, in spite of his embarrassment in her society, the accent of a man who had succeeded already. There was no doubt in her mind that he would prove strong enough to carry all her burdens as well as his own. She could get that support, in exchange for old Keziah's, by the perfectly practical expedient of making him fall in love with her and marry her. It would hardly take an effort.

She scorched the idea to death before it had time to state itself explicitly, with a hot blast of contempt that brought the color up into her cheeks again and a hard light into her eyes.

Newton stared at her in consternation.

"What's the matter?" he gasped. "Did I say anything that . . .?"

"Not a thing," she interrupted.

And just then Keziah came into the room.

They must have pretty well forgotten about her, for a fact, since she had managed to get completely dressed without giving either of them an inkling that she was

stirring. And the way Newton sprang up at the sight of her had a touch of surprise about it.

He managed to say, "Good morning, mother," composedly enough, and went over to the wall to get a chair for her. But she checked him with a gesture.

"I guess we might as well have an understandin' first as last," she said. "I didn't pack up my trunk last night, and just for the present I don't reckon I will."

Hazel pushed back her chair from the table.

"Sit down here," she said to old Keziah. "I'm through." She glanced at her wrist-watch. "I'm going down-town to do some shopping before the matinée. See you later."

She managed a sort of nod of farewell to Newton before she left the room.

Old Keziah pulled up the vacant chair and sat down comfortably to her breakfast, and she contemplated Newton's culinary triumphs with undisguised satisfaction.

"I'm good and hungry," she said. "I've been awake a right smart while."

She smiled placidly across the table at her son, who blushed again. "Ever sence you rang the door-bell," she went on.

"But why in the world . . ." Newton began. But he hadn't the face to finish the question.

"I guess I'm ready to tell you now what you asked me last night," she said, as she poured her coffee. "Why I come out here in the first place. Why I didn't just go on waitin', in East Weston, till you was rich enough to come back and buy up the town, like you said you was goin' to, and show some of them back-bitin', gossipin' stick-in-the-muds that they was capable of bein' wrong once in a while—you used them very words, Newton, and I ain't never forgot 'em. You'd show 'em, you said, whether yer old mother was a fool or not for havin' given you a good education and a fair start.

"Well, that all seemed right and just to me, and I waited fer quite a spell, all the while you was at the School of Mines, and after. But it come to me all at once, why did I have to do my waitin' there—sewin' out fer the same folks, hearin' the same scandal, and gettin' to be most as ossified as the rest of 'em. They all thought I'd ben a fool once fer not givin' you to yer uncle, and then fer keepin' you in school, and most of all fer lettin' you go out West. Well, sez I, why not *be* a fool fer once? Why not cut loose and have my fling? Get up *some* mornin' without knowin' everything that was a-goin' to happen that day—like I'd dreamed of doin' ever sence I was a girl. So I up and come to Chicago."

"You've always wanted to do that!" gasped Newton.

It was almost as much of a shock to him as Hazel had been.

She nodded. "I've done my work," she said, "and I ain't never complained. But I calc'late it's finished and I'm entitled to a good time. I don't want to be selfish, but I ain't a-goin' back to East Weston nor out to your mine until you get it fixed up comfortable. I'm goin' to stay right here."

IV

What quinine is, or calomel, to the medical practitioner, such to the writer of theatrical stories is the understudy. You take a humble, unappreciated little heroine, who is looked down upon by everybody. Nobody realizes her possibilities; she has a part in which she says, "Isn't it a lovely night? Let us go out on the terrace," or "Will you wear your emeralds tonight, madam, or the pearls?" If she says these lines for what they are worth nobody pays any attention to her, and if she tries to dramatize them the stage manager calls her down. She hasn't a chance in the world.

But she has understudied the star (it is safest to make it a waning star), and then one night the star falls ill and the little heroine takes her place, giving, of course, a far more brilliant performance than that of the star herself. Among all the models of ready-

made styles in plots, this is one of the most popular sellers.

But in unreal life—that is to say, the life of the theater—the understudy is not a very important institution. The reason is that, broadly speaking, actors and actresses are never ill. They may be what other people would call ill if they felt that way themselves. They may get up giddily in the morning, declining anything for breakfast but a cup of black coffee; their heads may feel as if they meant to burst; their voices be nothing but raucous whispers; their hands and feet non-sentient lumps of ice, but they obviously are not ill, because, at eight thirty-seven—or whatever the precise moment is—they are waiting in the wings for the cue—the voice comes back miraculously for the first line, nobody in front knows that anything is the matter, and the understudy, in a mixture of rage and relief, says, "Isn't it a lovely night? Let's go out on the terrace," just as usual.

And so when on the night that followed the first appearance of the rube, Hazel, about half-way through the first act, began walking crooked and saying things that weren't in her lines at all, and finally, with an instinct not wholly submerged by her delirium, started for the wings, where she tumbled in a heap just out of view of the audience, the company were

taken as completely by surprise as if they had been a group of children.

They got a doctor around from the front of the house, who, after an examination, quieted what was almost a panic among the chorus by assuring them that she wasn't going to die then and there, but who said that her temperature was a hundred and four, that she ought to have spent the last week in bed, and who seemed inclined to hold Freddy Boldt criminally responsible for having allowed her to go on in such a condition. He and Keziah took her home in a taxi, where she was put to bed and given muriate of ammonia and aspirin, just as if she were a regular sick person.

Meanwhile, at the theater, an utterly panic-stricken understudy, who was, it appeared, the only one in the company who didn't know all of Hazel's lines, was giving the worst performance of *The Girl from Proctor's* that ever had been seen on any stage.

As Hazel's own doctor, who came the next morning, predicted, she recovered from the attack—the fever subsided and the terrible racking ache—and she was able, at the end of three or four days, to oxygenate what little blood she had with twenty respirations or so a minute.

The girl herself noted these symptoms of conva-

lescence rather apathetically. It seemed almost stupid to get well—as well as she could get. The one inducement she was conscious of was the desire to get rid of the trained nurse, whom she and Keziah detested about equally. They did get rid of her within a week, by which time the Swedish maid-of-all-work was adequate to supply Hazel's wants during the hours while Keziah was at the theater. She didn't want much, except to be let alone.

Every day, during Keziah's absence, Hazel made up her mind to ask her the question—the one great question that mattered—when she came home that night. But every night, in a panic of terror, she put the question off until the next morning, and every morning kept postponing it until it was time for Keziah to set out and too late for her to give the answer. The question was, of course, when was Keziah going to follow her son back West. Was it to be next week, or next month, or by any miracle of good fortune, was Keziah going to wait until he had built for her the house he had talked about?

The old lady gave her no hint, said nothing to indicate, in any way, that anything had happened to change their old régime. They chatted a little every night, and again in the morning, Keziah bringing her the Globe's daily budget of news, and friendly messages from everybody. They were all anxious to come out

and see her, Keziah said—everybody from Willy Lord down to the members of the chorus—and were only waiting to hear that she was strong enough to see a little company to begin making regular visits.

There were flowers nearly every day, too, which Keziah kept in the kitchen sink, or, on mild days, out on the fire-escape. Hazel couldn't bear them around in the room. She said the smell of them made her think she was dead.

The doctor came one morning, before old Keziah had left for the theater, scowled over his patient in a ferocious manner, told her she was ever so much better than she thought she was, and ordered her to buck up and take a brace. On the way out he spoke to Keziah.

"Have some of her friends come to see her," he said, "whether she wants them or not."

That afternoon when the door-bell rang, as it frequently did, the maid, instead of bringing in a long pasteboard box from the florist's, stepped aside and admitted to the sitting-room—well, just about the last person in the world Hazel had expected to see—the big bronzed rube—no less—who, she supposed, had gone back to Arizona within a day two of the time she had fallen ill.

Her first thought was that here was the answer to the question she had never dared ask of old Keziah.

"You've come back to get her!" she said with a gasp. "Don't! Don't take her away from me—yet."

He didn't seem to understand at first, and then he smiled.

"I didn't go back at all," he said. "I've just been waiting for another chance to see you."

She gazed at him fixedly for the better part of a minute, though the look in his honest face had been plain to read in a glance. Then her head dropped back on the pillow and she turned her face away from him.

"Oh, please!" she said, with a weak little shiver, "please go away!"

You see his being there at all, to say nothing of the way he was looking at her, showed her the way out again, the way that was there so easy for the taking. And what she meant was that she wasn't strong enough to make a fight against him, hold him off, show herself up to him, send him on his way properly disgusted with her.

He couldn't interpret it, of course. But he wasn't at all tragic about it; just smiled at her with a touch of old Keziah's good-humored obstinacy and told her that the doctor had prescribed visitors. It was just as well, he thought, that the first one shouldn't be too interesting, so wouldn't she let him sit down for a while and tell her about Arizona?

There was no resisting the way he pulled up a chair and discovered where the light shone into her eyes from, and that she wanted a drink of water, and that the pillows were bunched uncomfortably under the back of her neck. The touch of his hands as he lifted her to settle the pillows was curiously pleasant.

"I didn't mean to be so rotten," she said with a washed-out smile. "Just a grouch. Where *is* Arizona?"

Well, that was the way it began, and having let it begin the girl found it hard to stop it. He didn't stay so very long that first day—at least it didn't seem long, and the hour after he had gone did—but like the camel that got his head into the tent, Newton rapidly made himself an inevitable part of the establishment.

Other visitors took to coming on succeeding days; people from the company on afternoons when there were no matinées, fat George Featherstonbaugh, and Zora, and Josephine Foster, and sometimes a bunch of the ponies—funny, bold, frightened little people with a cooperative bunch of violets or a box of candy. Willy Lord came, too, and used to cheer her up by telling her how rotten the show was with her out of it, and how much money she was losing him by not getting well quicker.

Then there was Jimmy Wallace, a slim young man with powerfully ground nose glasses and a way of saying things that didn't begin to bite in until about a minute after he had said them; and a friend of his with a disrespectful manner and a vast knowledge of unclassified subjects. Hazel explained to Newton, after they had gone, that Jimmy was a dramatic critic and that the other man wrote dope for a sure-enough magazine.

Because, you see, Newton was always there, whether the others were or not; and he always stayed after they had gone away, long enough at least to make sure that she was not too tired and that there wasn't anything she wanted. He never got in the way; always dropped cheerfully into the background, answered the bell, fetched things and carried them away, and when there wasn't anything else for him to do sat back in his corner and listened to the rapid-fire talk in a language that he didn't understand at all.

She shot a look around at him every now and then, as if to see what he was making of it, or whether he was shocked, and the smile he gave her back when he caught any of these looks almost brought a lump into her throat, it was so like old Keziah's.

There was no denying it was a relief, after the noise and the fuss and the sentimental farewells of the others had died away, to have him pull his chair up

close so that she shouldn't have to speak loud, and talk to her—about Arizona, or East Weston, or the theater—which latter place, it appeared, he frequented during the odd hours when he wasn't taking care of Hazel.

This fact disturbed the girl when she heard of it. It would be all right, of course, if she were there herself to keep an eye on people—guard his precious innocence as she had guarded old Keziah's. In her absence weren't they likely to give him some horrible shocks—disillusionize and disgust him completely?

Well, wasn't that just what she wanted?

That question pulled her up with a jump. Wouldn't it save her the trouble of doing just that very thing herself?—Let her off the big fight with him that she kept telling herself she wasn't strong enough for—yet? She dismissed the question from her mind in a rage, but she was too honest to avoid the answer, and she described herself, to herself, in terms that Newton, had he heard them, could have attributed only to delirium.

Things went on after that much as they had before—on the surface. But the girl was conscious of a difference underneath. She couldn't be sure whether Newton was or not. And then, one day, the explosion happened.

Newton was out in the kitchen making her an egg-

nog, when Hazel, who had been sitting up in the Morris chair, decided she wanted to look at the morning paper, and got up rather too suddenly to get it. They were encouraging her to walk a few steps now and then, but this time the thing didn't work. Everything went black, and, after turning and trying to grope her way back to the chair, she fainted.

The next thing she knew she was being kissed.

I will not pretend that it was a new experience to Hazel, but I do aver, positively, that it was a new sensation. The strength of it kept her from opening her eyes quite as soon as she might otherwise have done. When she did she found herself lying on her couch. Newton had been sitting on the edge of it beside her, holding her hands. But he let them go and arose, rather precipitately, when she opened her eyes.

"I can't stand it," she heard him say, as he turned away from her. "I can't stand this."

She steadied herself with a long breath or two, stolen while his back was turned to her in his patrol of the room. When he turned back he met her familiar ironic smile.

"I don't wonder," she said. "Cooped up all day with a sick cat like me. Why don't you go back to Arizona?"

He came all the way back to the couch, and towered over her almost threateningly, before he answered.

"That's what I'm going to do," he said, "and I'm going to take you back with me."

"Get me a job as—what do you call 'em—'biscuit-shooter' at the camp?" she inquired derisively.

He sat down, suddenly, beside her and it sapped pretty near all the courage away from her to feel that he was trembling uncontrollably.

"I know how you feel about me," he said, taking pains with every word. "How you must feel about anybody—any—any rube like me, after the people you're used to. But that doesn't matter a bit. Because I'm not asking for a thing—just that you come up with mother as her—guest, and get well and strong again, so that you can come back here to your work and your—success, and all that means such a lot to you here. It's Spring out there now, already, and I know we can make you comfortable. You can be out of doors all day. In a few weeks you'll be strong enough to ride. In six months you'll be well again and we'll shake hands and say good-by, and you'll come back here. It'll all be understood from the start. I'm not asking a thing. There! Now that that's all clear, can't you do it?"

"Not in a thousand years," said Hazel. "I may not be much good, but I'm not that kind of a grafter."

He sprang up at that and echoed the word "grafter" indignantly.

"Well," she persisted, "isn't that what it comes to? Taking your charity . . ."

He fairly dashed that word back at her. "Charity!" he said. "When all I want in the world is just to take care of you and see that nothing gets a chance to hurt you, again, or frighten you . . ."

With that she sprung her trap.

"And you'd have me take all that," she interrupted; "everything you've got to give a woman, and use it to get well on, and then hand you out a happy ta-ta and come back to work?"

He stared at her incredulously.

"You know," he said, after a silence, and hardly able to command his voice at all, "you know what it is I want."

Her green eyes met his with their old-time, straight stare.

"What is it that you want?" she demanded.

"I want you to marry me." Under her stare a deep burning blush came into his face. "You—you didn't think . . .?"

"Oh," she said, "you make me laugh."

But the very last ounce of her control and resolution had gone into the contemptuous inflection of these words. She couldn't help what happened afterward.

"I'm not making you laugh," he said quite simply.

"I'm making you cry." And with that observation he sat down beside her again and caught both her hands in his, and pretty nearly crushed them, he held them so tight.

She turned her face away with a shudder.

"You couldn't marry me," she said. "I'm not what you thought I was, that first night you saw me with the make-up on, but I'm more like that than I am like the little innocent who didn't know what the things meant that she said on the stage. My Gawd! Do you suppose a girl could live the life we do . . . ? No—let go of me and listen. Let me just tell you a few things."

"Not now, nor ever," he said. "There's just one thing you can tell me that'll get you rid of me for good in a minute. If you don't tell me that, I shan't want to hear anything else."

She went almost as white as when she fainted, and she felt her lips stiffening, but she managed the question.

"What is that thing?" she asked.

"That you don't love me," he said; "that you don't like to have me near you; that it hurts you to have me hold you like this; that you're happier when I'm away from you than when I'm with you. Can you tell me that?"

But Hazel couldn't.

Presently, though, when he gave her another chance to speak, she ventured a last protest.

"It's a rotten trick to play on—on your mother," she said.

"Letting me marry you?" he asked, and then he grinned. "I told her I meant to do it, that very first morning, after you went down-town. She's been keeping me from getting discouraged ever since."

"Can you beat that?" said Hazel, and she lay there in his arms so quietly and so long that he began to wonder what she was thinking about.

"I've known some pretty good sports in my day," she said at last. "But you can take it from me, the best sport I know, that's got all the rest of them faded to a fare-you-well, is old Keziah."

THE REDEEMER

TO a person of the reformatory habit of mind—and, to avoid abstractions, let us assume such a person; the spectacled secretary, let us say, of an imaginary Purity League—the sights and the sounds of Sammy's little café, especially if he had elected to visit it at twelve fifty-five A. M., on, perhaps, a Saturday night, just as Ernest, the waiter, had uttered the stentorian warning, "Last drinks!" might, I suppose, seem rather scandalous.

But—this is perhaps more surprising though no less true—Sammy himself would equally be scandalized and outraged by the intrusion of the secretary and by whatever interpretation he might put upon the things he saw and heard there that should lead him to be scandalized.

In a word, I doubt if it would be possible for Sammy and the secretary of a Purity League ever to understand each other or to accord to each other the respectful admiration which each undoubtedly deserves.

You will find Sammy's at the lower end of a stairway whose length and steepness might make it perilous

if it were not also so narrow (I'm not sure there isn't something symbolistic about this). If you are a typical patron of the place you will come plunging down this stairway at about half past eleven o'clock at night, hungry and thirsty—for beer—and tired with an evening's singing and dancing in the chorus of one of the musical shows about town.

Arrived safely at the foot of the stairs, you will find yourself in a plain, clean, white-painted room, not very big, with a lot of little round tables out in the middle of it, all covered with white table-cloths, and along the sides oblong tables with high-backed settles in between, which, though they don't constitute them private, diminish somewhat the publicity of those who elect to sit at them. The walls and the big square pillars that hold up the building overhead are ornamented mostly with framed photographs of chorus girls, inscribed, by their originals in tumultuously affectionate splutters of ink to their dear Sammy.

There is nothing formal or perfunctory, I'll venture to assert, about any of these expressions of regard. For Sammy may safely be said to be the object of more heart-whole affection on the part of the chorus than all the Johns who ever ordered taxi-cabs or opened wine in Chicago.

And I'm bound to say that it seems to me that Sammy deserves it. At least he has grasped and put into effect

one thoroughly practical distinction—the distinction, that is to say, between the sort of girl that chorus girls mostly are, the sort who, at the end of a day's work like for a while to eat and drink and be a little merry in the friendly company of people they know, and the sort of girl to whom the eating and the drinking and the merriment are mere perfunctory, businesslike preliminaries to the plying of her trade.

One might think it an easy distinction to make. But, as far as I know, Sammy is the only purveyor of nocturnal refreshment who even attempts it. Among his colleagues the accepted badge of respectability for a woman—certainly after eleven P. M.—is the possession of a male escort. Duly escorted, any sort of woman, provided her manners and dress are not too flagrant, can go, broadly speaking, anywhere. And there are places where the professional bird of prey, unescorted, can go and be recognized for precisely what she is. But the only place I know of where, at the end of her performance, a chorus girl can go all by herself in quest of companionship and food and lager beer, and in the certainty that the object of her quest will not be misunderstood, is Sammy's.

I won't pretend that the merriment she finds there would be wholly acceptable to persons fastidious in matters of decorum, nor vouch for the austerity of the morals of all the companions she finds there. In-

deed, I can not vouch for her own. The secretary of a Purity League might not feel that there was any very vital distinction to be drawn between our little chorus girl and the woman Sammy would decline to serve with so much as a glass of beer. But I want to insist that the chorus girl herself makes that distinction very sharply and that she's wonderfully grateful to Sammy for backing her up in it.

She feels toward him, apparently, as one would toward an indulgent uncle. She tells him her troubles, signs her name to his restaurant checks when she hasn't the price of a meal, and loyally pays him back afterward when she gets a job. And if ever, as not infrequently happens, she manages to step out of the rank of the chorus and down into the apron among the principals, there is no one she shares her triumph with more joyously than with Sammy.

Well, there you are. It's been rather a long disquisition, I am afraid, but while this story is not about Sammy, it is concerned with what happened in his café one Christmas Eve under, as it were, his auspices and I have felt the importance of disabusing you, at the outset, of the misunderstanding into which the secretary of the Purity League would almost inevitably be led.

It was not in the hope of finding care-free merriment in the company of friends that the young man at

a little round table in the corner, puffing meditatively at a cigar and sipping a pint of beer, had, a little irresolutely, turned down the narrow stairway somewhat before eleven o'clock. Indeed, no one in his senses was likely to turn in here to-night for that purpose, since it would be patent to the dimmest intellect that no one who had anywhere else to go on Christmas Eve, would come here. A handful of forlorn chorus girls, a peripatetic pair of vaudevillains who were doing a knockabout sketch in one, at the four-show-a-day house in the next block, and a few belated, rather transitory newspaper men, would just about complete the tale of Sammy's patronage to-night. But it was too early yet for any of them.

If the abode of melancholy were what young Richard Foster was looking for, an unerring instinct had led him to the right place. Well, it was, he reflected over his beer, exactly what he had been looking for. And yet it would have puzzled him to tell you why.

Certainly if Fate ever gave a man a special license to feel riotously exultant, it seemed that she had given him one to-night. The three wise men from the East with whom he had been dining at the Blackstone had told him so again and again in variously chosen words. Success, his and theirs—solid, calculable, negotiable success—had been the burden of their talk.

If last September you had made him the prophecy

that his unpretentious little comedy which for the past year he had vainly been trying to get produced and which was then about to be put on, in a highly tentative fashion with made-over scenery and a ramshackle cast at the dingiest and least popular of the down-town theaters, was going to turn out to be so solidly and unequivocally what the public was willing to pay for that the Sold Out sign would decorate its lobby during the convulsions of Christmas shopping, he would have heard you through with the rueful smile of one who acknowledges the reduction to absurdity of his own day-dreams.

And if, essaying higher flights, you had gone on to tell him that the fame of his little piece would spread to Forty-second Street, and that the three wise men, namely, David Morini himself, and the principal playwright of his stable, George Board, and his specially imported English stage director, Arbuthnot Craik, would make a special trip to Chicago to see it and would acclaim it a masterpiece and offer it a New York production in Morini's favorite theater with an authentic star in the title part, and would ask him to dinner and exhibit a grave concern as to when his next work would be ready—well, before you had half finished telling young Foster all this, he would have yawned at you and advised you to resume tobacco for smoking purposes. And yet the whole of this gro-

tesque prediction would have been verified by the cold, literal, undeniable facts.

The little dinner at the Blackstone should have been the joyous climax of three tremendously thrilling days. It had not been splurging or over-elaborate—there was just a sort of expensive rightness about it, and the fact that it had been served privately in Morini's own suite, while it lent a sort of supererogatory splendor to the scrupulous evening dress which the three wise men wore, obviated the faint discomfort young Foster might have felt over having come in what Board would doubtless have called tweeds.

Board wasn't English. He had grown up, as a matter of fact, right here in Chicago, and his first success had been one of the string of little musical shows that Willy Lord used to put on at the Globe. Still, a man had the right to wear a silk hat, if he chose, even though he came from Chicago, and perhaps it was right and natural that he should refer to it as a "topper." The other incidents of the dinner were no less elusive of adverse criticism. Board, who had done most of the talking, had spent half an hour in an analysis of his play. He hadn't patronized it, and surely his own involuntary and unspoken comment, "Well, he needn't have tried so damned hard not to," had been preposterously captious.

It had appeared, as Board's laboriously serious analy-

sis proceeded, that, all unconsciously, Foster had been following some of the profoundest maxims of the modern theater. His open disavowal of any knowledge of these maxims, Board took to indicate — and the others with nods corroborated—that the young playwright possessed the true dramaturgic instinct.

Of course this ought to have made him very happy. His own explanation—that he'd had the luck to get hold of a good story, that it concerned itself with the sort of people he understood, and that he'd managed to present them and it with a kind of freshness and honesty that had proved attractive—this explanation of his success carried with it no guarantee that it could be repeated. Whereas, if the three wise men were right—and, contemplating their prodigious wisdom at close range like this, who could doubt it?—he could succeed again just as often as he pleased. Because one could memorize maxims and need never forget formulæ.

There was nothing a bit professorial about it. The maxims were stated by all three of the wise men in a vernacular at once so sophisticated and so Rabelaisian in its crudity, that one instantly understood them to be no mere academic dogmas, but the practical working principles of men adept in their trade. With them had gone a wealth of specific illustration by examples, many of them supplied by Board himself

from his own successes and, no less candidly, from his infrequent failures.

The most interesting case in point was his present New York success—*The One Law*—which Board had adduced in refutation of the idea that the public wouldn't stand for problem plays. The idea of this play had been to demonstrate—in four acts—that the one law was applicable to the conduct of men no less than women. The play had been tried out in Washington and had gone fairly well. But both Board and Morini had seen something was wrong in the big act —where the woman out of the man's past comes back into his now blameless life and tries to demolish it. Board, referring to his maxims, had soon discovered what was wrong. He had the man, in a big scene, force the woman to admit that he had offered to atone for their sin by marrying her. This admission put him right with the audience and, with this change, it had gone enormously big.

There was nothing Bohemian about the three wise men, and at ten-thirty the evening was over. No prolongation into the small hours for them any more. Foster got up to go. But, after the valet had brought him his hat and stick, Morini, with an almost caressing hand upon his shoulder, led him to the door and delivered himself of a final apothegm.

"All I want in any play, my boy," he said, "is thirty

seconds—thirty seconds when the audience are half out of their seats. The rest of the play doesn't matter. I can hire men at a hundred dollars a week to write it for me. But if anybody can give me thirty seconds, I can make him rich. And you're the man who can do it."

With this benediction in his ears young Foster had gone down in the elevator, and in a deepening and perfectly inexplicable melancholy had made his way, straight as the rectangular arrangement of Chicago's streets would admit, to, of all places in the world, Sammy's.

The thing he told himself he meant to think about before his final session with Morini in the morning was the new play he was writing. He wanted to make a few big changes in the outline of it on the basis of some of his newly acquired wisdom. He'd make his ordinary six-thousand-a-year business man into a magnate, of course, and shift the locale of the thing from the unfashionable suburb he was best acquainted with to Fifth Avenue. "You want," Board had said, "to give them all the coin and all the class you possibly can." And the other two wise men had assented feelingly.

Well, that was easy. What really needed thinking over was the big scene at the end of the second act.

How was he to get the kick into it that Board discoursed so feelingly about? How was he to give Morini his thirty seconds? There were one or two of Board's maxims that he thought might supply the answer.

He stopped dead in the middle of the sidewalk to administer a well-merited kick to a fractious insurgent in his mind, who insisted that with those changes made, his play would be as dull as ditch-water—as dull, it had the effrontery to add, as Board's fake problem in *The One Law.*

The insurgent was invited to cease being a damn fool. He wanted to succeed, didn't he? Didn't he want a motor, and a cozy little bachelor's apartment on Forty-sixth Street—the admission to terms almost of equality by men like Morini and Hirschberg—the certainty of a fraternal welcome by the little group of super-illuminati down at the far corner of the long bar in The Lambs whenever he dropped into that delightful retreat? Naturally he did. The rebel couldn't deny this and they walked on. But he wasn't permanently silenced, it seemed, for along in the middle of the next block he spoke up again.

"All the same," he observed, "you know yourself that Morini is nothing but a two-dollar edition of P. T. Barnum, and that that precious Craik has no

more vitals than a Japanese print. And as for Board, he's a stuffed man, that's what he is. Stuffed with sawdust and varnished with shellac."

The common-sense half of him protested. "Even if that's true, and I don't admit it—they've got there, haven't they? Aren't the high-brows crazy about Craik? Isn't Morini supposed to be the most artistic producer in the country? Look at that big scene of his in the telephone exchange—six real operators, and calls getting put through all the time. As for Board: the critics take him seriously, don't they? *They* don't call his problems fakes. They agree he's the leading American dramatist. Well, if I ever get where he is, that'll be good enough for me."

This last conversation had taken place at the head of the stairs leading down to Sammy's.

"And, just to show you," he went on, "the sort of thing you're going to get away from, if you'll use a little common sense and take the advice of men who know the game, we'll turn down here."

The insurgent murmured incoherently that at least it might help him to forget the shine of Board's silk hat.

And then the two of them merged into the person of Richard Foster, the promising young playwright.

Sammy greeted him warmly, saw to it that the waiter brought him the beer he wanted, and then, per-

ceiving that he didn't seem very communicative, withdrew, leaving him to the company of his cigar and his pint.

Here was a good chance, while it was so quiet, to figure out the mechanics of the thirty seconds Morini would want in his second act. But just as he began getting at it, a knock-about vaudeville team picked up moorings at the next table, and, with a seriousness that he found uncomfortably pathetic, went on trying to figure out (they'd been at it probably ever since they left the stage) why they had lost, to-night, a certain laugh. One of them, it seemed, had a line where he asked the other where some important historical event had taken place, and the other said, "In Englewood." And to-night, mysteriously, the regular laugh they counted on at this point hadn't come. They were a good deal more serious over it than they would have been over the loss of a ten-dollar bill.

"Perhaps," one of them suggested, "if you said Evanston instead of Englewood, it would go better."

But the man who had the line thought Englewood was all right. He believed the other man had queered the laugh by putting his hand in his pocket just as he was saying it.

But the thing that put Foster's elusive thirty seconds clean out of his head was the reflection that Failure was just as full of maxims as Success. These

two poor wretches whose function was, apparently, to discourage audiences into going out at the end of one show in order that room might be left in the house for a new harvest of quarters and dimes at the beginning of the next one, made fetishes of their formulæ just as much as Board and Morini did. Well, but of course . . .! Board's and Morini's maxims were right and the others were wrong, that was the answer.

A thin trickle of chorus people from the *Girly-Whirly* around the corner, and from the *Liberty Belle* up the street, had begun coming in, and the first note of the melancholy that was to develop later was struck when somebody wished one of them a Merry Christmas and was adjured, for God's sake, to cut it out. No great proportion of them, you'd have said, could have any very poignant memories of hearthstone and holly, bulging stockings and Yuletide cheer. And yet the vacuum where such memories ought to be—the sense of an *a priori* right to such experiences, never satisfied, ached apparently, like an amputated limb for this one night in the year, in everybody. Even young Foster, who had supposed himself immune, found himself giving way to it.

There were two ways of treating the ailment: one, to get up and go away and think about something else; the other to imbibe a sufficient quantity of gin or its

equivalent so that melancholy should become luxurious —something to be wallowed in comfortably.

This latter course didn't appeal to Foster and he was about to take to flight as its alternative, when he saw Jimmy Wallace standing in the doorway. He was loaded to the armpits with a miscellaneous assortment of packages, and as his gaze roved about the room, you could see a faint smile on his lips. The moment he caught Foster's eye he came over to his table and sat down.

Jimmy was a dramatic critic, and the packages, now piled in a chair, represented a stream of Christmas presents that had been coming into the office all the afternoon.

He had just dropped in, on his way to the elevated, to have a glass of beer and accumulate sufficient muscular energy to carry his presents the rest of the way. His mind was filled with forebodings, which, he asserted, were melancholy, but not sentimental.

Jimmy had a sister and a brother-in-law and a bunch of small nephews and nieces, with whom he was solemnly contracted to perhaps the most terrifying experience that the mind of a dramatic critic working on a morning paper can conceive; namely, a family breakfast at seven A. M. As Jimmy presented the problem, it was a perfect dilemma. If he went straight home to bed, with an alarm clock set to arouse him

at the hellish hour of six-thirty, he would sit down at that breakfast table in a spirit little short of murderous, and, under the further excitation of the drum his smallest nephew was sure to get from Santa Claus, there was no telling what he might do. But if he followed the more logical course, regarding seven o'clock not as an early hour of the morning but an advanced hour of the night and sat up for it, he was afraid, although he could guarantee his spirits to be sufficiently jolly and convivial, they would not be of a quality that his sister and his brother-in-law would consider appropriate.

Foster, feeling more cheerful over the contemplation of this difficulty than at any time since his first talk with Morini—for Jimmy Wallace was a human being, although a dramatic critic—suggested a compromise. Jimmy should stay here and keep him company for an hour or two, with appropriate libations, and then go home to bed. Jimmy agreed that this was a good idea, and the Christmas Eve gloom of that one corner down in Sammy's, lightened a little. They had worlds of things to talk about.

Presently a girl at one of the side tables arose and left her place, and in doing so crossed Foster's field of vision. He had noticed her when she came in and had wondered who she was, his glance pausing, as she passed his table, in dubious recognition.

She was older than the bunch of ponies she had come in with—somewhere in her middle twenties—and larger; a show-girl, or at least a medium. And though there could be no doubt as to what she was, she didn't run true to type. There was, not quite explicably, a difference about her. She had the look of being somebody. The true show-girl, he had reflected, if you could teach her to stand perfectly still, could be introduced into one of the grand spring opening window displays along State Street without causing any one to suspect that she was modeled of a different wax from the other images. And it occurred to him that no ordinary show-girl would have missed the look of latent recognition that must have been in his own face.

Now, when he saw her again, he asked Wallace, idly enough, who she was.

Jimmy craned around and looked. The girl had stopped two or three tables away, chatting with two men she knew, her hand resting negligently on the shoulder of the one nearest her.

"Oh, that's Charlie Ferris," said Jimmy, as he turned around.

Foster said he supposed Charlie was an abbreviation of Charlotte, and Jimmy said yes, he believed it was. But his mind evidently had glanced off at a tangent.

"By the way," he said, "I hear George Board is in town."

"Yes," Foster said, "I've just been spending the evening with him. But why 'by the way'?"

"Oh," Jimmy said, "that's quite a story."

If Jimmy Wallace should write all the stories he knows into a book—stories whose principal actors he has known at first or second hand—well, I don't want to give you a wrong notion of Jimmy, as I might perhaps do if I said it would be a collection Queen Margaret of Navarre might have envied—but I'll assure you that I should hasten to buy a copy.

He didn't, however, immediately tell Richard Foster the story that so extraordinarily concerned itself with two people as widely separated as George Board and "Charlie" Ferris. Indeed, as matters turned out, he didn't tell it at all. His mind seemed to have glanced away again and he was frowning as if over an interesting surmise.

"Do you know about that new play of his—*The One Law?*" he wanted to know.

"Only what he told me about it to-night," said Foster, and in twenty words or so he passed his knowledge along.

Jimmy's smile puckered over it a little, as if he'd just bitten into a persimmon and the taste of it amused him.

"It would be interesting," he observed, "to know what Ferris will think of that when she sees it."

And at that Foster caught the idea. "You mean he had an affair with her, and that he's used it?"

"Oh, I don't know how much of it he's used," said Jimmy, "but it certainly was some affair. They were wildly in love with each other for a while, all right. She was in the chorus of his first show—*The Smiling Princess,* over at the Globe. And the extraordinary part of the story was that, after he made his hit, he wanted to marry her, or at any rate offered to, and she wouldn't do it."

Foster couldn't help it. The insurgent for the moment got the upper hand of him.

"That isn't the extraordinary part of it to me. The really incredible notion is that George Board could ever have been wildly in love with . . ."

He broke off with a gasp. Because he saw that the words, "George Board," had done as people's names have a trick of doing—sailed out clear of their context and fairly caught the ear of the girl. She had turned away from the table where the two men were sitting and was moving across toward her own. And, automatically, at the sound of those two words, she stopped short and looked around.

Jimmy had looked, too, to see what had checked his companion's speech so suddenly, and his eyes met

Charlie's. He knew perfectly well, of course, what had happened.

"Oh, hello!" he sang out to her. "I haven't seen you down here for ever so long. Come over and have a drink. Meet Mr. Foster."

The etiquette of Sammy's is a little different from that acknowledged, say, at the Blackstone, though it is just as exact. Jimmy's invitation was perfectly *en règle*. Young Foster found himself flushing up a little as he rose and shook hands with the girl. But she was perfectly serene. A waiter was already bringing up a chair for her. She murmered to him that she'd have a "clover," but he seemed to know that in advance anyway.

"No," she said conversationally to Jimmy, in answer to what he had said a minute before. "I always get drunk when I come down here, so I don't come so very often. But Christmas Eve . . ." She finished the sentence with a shrug of her good-looking shoulders.

Then she looked around at Foster, and the easy purposeful way in which her eyes engaged his made him think—but then he knew he was not expert in such matters—that the process of intoxication could not have gone very far to-night.

"I thought I heard you saying something about George Board," she said.

"Why, yes. I had dinner with him to-night. Wallace and I were talking about his new play."

He felt himself saying it precipitately like an embarrassed schoolboy. He didn't quite know why, either. Unless it was that the feeling he had got faintly at first sight of her—the sense of her being somebody extraordinarily real—accentuated itself so strongly when she spoke to him.

"I'd like to see George again," she said. And then she smiled.

Foster would have liked a glossary on that smile. There was something complex about it that piqued his curiosity. But he didn't know how to set about getting it.

Wallace, though, was more expert. "Why don't you?" he asked. "He's in town for a day or two. Mr. Foster here knows his address."

"Nothing doing," she said.

She made a pause there, but both men knew something more was coming and waited for it.

"I did see him once—oh, a couple of years ago. Walked right into him on the street, coming around the corner, and it seemed so good, I asked him to turn in somewhere where we could sit down and talk over old times. His voice sounded kind of queer, and when I looked at him I saw I'd frightened him nearly to death."

Foster repeated the word, "frightened," incredulously.

"Oh, well, he's married, you know," the girl said.

With a grin Jimmy picked up the theme and embroidered on it. "Poor Board! Visions of blackmail and denunciation. Probably went white every time his wife was called to the telephone for a week."

At that, in the illumination of a lightning flash, Foster saw where *The Only Law* was conceived. The scare Board had got from the girl had been worth about fifty thousand dollars to him. He smiled at that.

The girl was smiling, too, but thoughtfully. "I wouldn't have done anything like that," she said to him. "He's welcome to a peaceful married life for all of me." Now she turned to Jimmy. "But I would have liked a good old-fashioned spiel with him. That's if he was like he used to be."

Her mastery of the subjunctive mood was not sufficient to enable her to indicate that she knew this supposition to be contrary to fact, but the cadence of her voice showed it well enough without that.

"Oh, well," she said, "we've all got to go our own ways, haven't we?" She reached out and dropped her hand on Wallace's arm. "He was a prince, Jimmy."

The waiter came up with her clover leaf cocktail

"He's welcome to his peaceful married life for all of me," she said.

just then, and Jimmy thought they'd better have another all around while the man was at hand.

And the talk drifted out of the eddy it had for a moment paused in, and merged with the current that was flowing all around them—a certain amount of good-humored gossip, punctuated here and there by a sharp rap of disparagement and a somewhat more copious stream of reminiscences tending to be melancholy but relieved here and there with a funny story.

But young Foster was not present; at least, not the whole of him. The promising dramatist who meant to give Morini his thirty seconds and grow rich and successful on the strength of it; who saw himself, a year from now, in an astrakhan overcoat, turning in magnificently at The Lambs, and allowing a page boy to relieve him of it, along with his topper and malacca stick—that young man listened to the talk, or contributed to it, with the best appearance of attention he could muster.

But the other young man, the insurgent, had gone on the warpath and was firing questions into him in a point-blank manner that he found most disconcerting.

What sort of man had the girl been remembering when she laid her hand on Wallace's arm and said in that still deep voice of hers: "He was a prince,

Jimmy?" Not at all the same man, evidently, that Foster had dined with to-night. No man could have lighted that look in her eyes across a memory of years who hadn't a spiritual fire of his own—a man quite indubitably alive—a man of whom it could congruously be said that he was "wildly in love" with somebody. Well, then, why did the picture projected so vividly by the girl's phrase, of a man she had known six or eight years ago, oppress him, Richard Foster, with so leaden a weight of melancholy?

It couldn't be for any other reason than that the man who had been a prince once, had stood just then on the same threshold where he, Richard Foster, was hesitating now. And this girl, if the story were true, had stood there in the doorway beside him. Only, for some queer reason Foster couldn't fathom, she had stayed where she was and let her prince go on alone.

He had gone on—steadily, industriously, undeniably, converting all the glittering prospects they must have looked at together from the threshold into golden realities, while the girl had stayed behind. To-night, as luck would have it—or was it something more than luck?—Foster had had the chance of measuring just how far apart they were.

Why had she stayed behind? Even Jimmy Wallace didn't know that. Why, having stayed behind, did

she not show, under the candor-compelling influence of all those frothy pink drinks she was leisurely sipping, a regret, a sense of defeat, over an opportunity irretrievably thrown away?

This question, unanswerable enough Heaven knew, would have troubled him more than it did had not another, more insoluble still, come treading right at its heels.

Why, the insurgent wanted to know, did he agree with the girl? Because, in defiance of common sense, he insisted he did. Up there at the hotel, upon the Olympian heights of acknowledged success, impregnably fortified behind his maxims and his formulæ, sat Board, training his guns with scientific accuracy, and firing away with hardly a miss. And down here in this basement café sat—well, a poor wretch of a drunken chorus girl. But while Board up there was dead and stuffed and varnished, this girl down here was alive. There was a fire in her still that could burn up in a clear flame. Those two sisters of the soul, pain and joy, could still look out through her eyes. It was a queer paradox. In the back of his mind there was a dormant association connected with the hour—with the approaching dawn of Christmas Day, which, if he could only get hold of it, would solve the puzzle.

The sane, reasonable, common-sense half of him

seized the opportunity, while the waiter stood at the table collecting orders for more drinks, to turn upon the insurgent with a bludgeon-like question that ought to have annihilated him.

"Look here," it said. "Suppose right now you had the choice offered you, so that by holding out your right hand or your left, you could be, ten years from now, what Board is to-night, or what he'd have been to-night, if he'd stayed back here with this girl . . ."

But there wasn't time for an answer, because of the commotion that started just then, three or four tables away. A man had stood up in his chair and was trying, precariously, to put one foot on the table. He had his watch in one hand and a glass in the other. A week from now, precisely, the action would cause no comment at all. The place would be crowded full, and everybody in an advanced state of merriment, having just wiped the old year off the slate, would frantically be wishing everybody else a happy new one. But, what this man on the table was trying to say, was Merry Christmas, and what the people who felt responsible for him were trying to do was to get him to come down and shut up and not be a damn fool. Because, down here, the heavenly chime, flung out from frosty belfries, had, you couldn't escape it, a note of piercing irony. The man subsided from the table, in a dead silence that lasted for seconds.

Charlie Ferris put down her glass, and, her elbows on the table, covered her face with her hands. But when she took them away, a minute or two later, the two men saw that she was smiling.

"George brought me a Christmas present eight years ago to-day," she said. "It was a sealskin coat. It must have cost him about a thousand dollars. That's what we had our row about."

She cradled her chin in one hand, and thoughtfully, with the other, twirled the thin stem of her glass. Presently she looked up at Wallace.

"Do you remember Birdie Washburn?" she asked. "I guess she was before your time. She and I used to pal around together everywhere. She fell in love with Hollis. He was the juvenile lead in our show at the time, and an awful lemon. He got his notice along about the first of December, and he went to New York, to look for another job, he said, and left her flat.

"Well, she came around to me and told me what was the matter with her. She was up against it good and plenty, and she needed two hundred dollars.

"I went to George for the money, and he said he couldn't make it. I thought it was kind of funny, because I knew *The Smiling Princess* was really bringing in coin. But I supposed he had debts and things, and I didn't say anything more.

"And then—get this—Christmas morning, he brings me this sealskin coat. It came down to my heels. And I say, 'Why wouldn't you let me have a little of this for Birdie?' And he got sore and said he was through with that kind of people. He wasn't going to float around with a bunch of bums any more, and he didn't want me to. He said if I wanted to, we could make it a case of marry, but anyhow, if I was going to trot with him, I'd got to cut out the others. And I told him to go to hell."

She smiled again. "Well, he didn't go, did he?" she concluded.

But young Foster drew in a long breath and leaned back suddenly in his chair; because to him it had become suddenly clear that this was exactly where Board had gone. He was a man they had put in the Bible a couple of thousand years ago, who thought he was rich and increased in goods and had need of nothing, having no idea that he was wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. "I know thy works," Someone had said to him, "that thou art neither cold nor hot, and so, because thou art lukewarm, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

And at that, the dormant association that had been bothering him woke up, so that the look with which he answered the girl's smile had something electrical about it.

If the Man whose birthday the unheard chimes were celebrating should drop in here to-night, at Sammy's, would He remember a supper party He once attended in much the same mixed sort of company, at the house of Simon the leper, in Bethany? And would He account for the paradox of Charlie Ferris, who sat there now, twirling the stem of her glass between her slim fingers, as He had for that of another girl, a good deal like her perhaps, who had been washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair?

Young Foster got suddenly to his feet, nodded a swift good night to Jimmy Wallace and held out a hand to the girl. She was still puzzling over that look of his. "Thank you," he said to her, and he hoped from what he saw in her eyes that, at least dimly, she understood.

Then he went out with an abruptness that left them wondering what he was in such a hurry about.

He wasn't sure himself. But at least he knew that it wasn't to write that thirty seconds for Morini.

THE ONLY GIRL

IF you had ridden up in the elevator one warm June afternoon, with Jimmy Wallace as he made his way to the theatrical typewriting establishment on the seventeenth floor, with the just completed manuscript of *The Only Girl* under his arm, and had told him that at that moment the firm of Byrne & Hackett were putting the finishing touches on a bond deal that would net them thirty thousand dollars, and if you had told him further that a girl named Muriel Scott, in process of being graduated from Smith College, was also at that moment, in the costume of a maiden on a Grecian urn, being introduced to a very beautiful lady in a lingerie frock, who was telling her that she "really had a touch of style, my dear," Jimmy would have put you down for a nut, with the tolerant mental observation, "let him rave," and gone his ways.

And yet, such are the inscrutable ways of Fate, both of these facts were to prove enormously more important to himself and to the manuscript under his arm than the one which was now causing his wisely skeptical heart a flutter of anticipation. This fact

was that a man high in the confidence of Bellingham—you know Bellingham, of course, the biggest musical comedy producer in the United States—was in Chicago and had agreed to spend one of his priceless hours listening to the musical comedy that Jimmy and Arthur Brinton had just completed.

For Bellingham's friend, when tracked down after having put them off twice and forgotten all about them twice more, was in a great hurry and only half awake. He had a grouch, and an ice-water thirst and, between yawns and looks at his watch, he said that that plot reminded him of *Erminie* and that the lyrics lacked punch. And Jimmy and Brinton left him at the end of thirty-five minutes, with murder in their hearts. It was an emotion they were to grow familiar with during the next few months.

I will not ask you to follow the thorny pilgrimage of *The Only Girl* through the offices of this obdurate manager and that. I know no more disagreeable sort of person than the one who, through sheer complacent boneheadedness, refuses to see that the play you have just read him is a knock-out and declines to put his money into the production of it, unless it be the sort who adds insult to injury by telling you that if you had written it entirely differently, according to some worn-out idea of his own, he would have taken it.

So, instead of dwelling on these painful and unpleasant subjects, I invite your attention to the young lady I spoke of before, namely, Miss Muriel Scott. There was nothing painful or unpleasant about her.

She was a very good-looking girl. You might have called her pretty, if a saving instinct hadn't pointed out to you that she'd take offense at the adjective, as budding Bachelors of Arts of her sex have a way of doing. She was full of college enthusiasms, college sentiments and a college education, and one could have found recent alumni and under-graduates of every college in New England who were nursing tenderly melancholy memories of dances they had had with her at Junior proms.

Muriel's father was an adequately pecunious person—a manufacturer of something to do with machinery, she didn't know just what—and in the absence of any domestic pressure upon the subject, she had remained, up to four thirty-seven of the Wednesday afternoon of her commencement week, quite vague as to what line of occupation she should pursue, now that college days were over. Teaching wasn't to be thought of, of course. Settlement work was going out—getting into the hands of professionals. Culture, Browning, drama clubs, all that sort of thing, made very little appeal to her. Indeed, she wasn't sure it wasn't a

little ridiculous. Well, she could go home and settle down and rest up and look about a little. She'd be sure to find something.

All this, as I say, before four thirty-seven on Wednesday afternoon. At four thirty-eight, she was devoted, consecrated, heart, soul and body, to a career. This is how it happened:

They had a pageant on the campus Wednesday afternoon, in which Muriel and seven of her classmates, in flowing robes, wreaths and sandals, did what was designated as a classic dance.

Well, it just happened that somebody who knew Elaine Arthur's weakness for university towns and faculties (I really believe she'd be more pleased with an honorary degree than she is with any of the orders and decorations she's received from infatuated emperors)—somebody had invited her up for this commencement. The eight young ladies, including Muriel, were not informed until it was all over, that the greatest dancer in the world was out there on the lawn in a camp chair. But when the pageant was finished, they were brought up and introduced to her for a treat.

It proved a bit awkward for the other seven, because Elaine is never anything but quite truthful in matters pertaining to her profession, and though she was warmly appreciative of the beauty of the campus —the buildings and so on, she made no comment

whatever upon the dance. But, as the eight were turning rather blankly away, she caught Muriel's eye and detained her for an instant while she uttered the momentous words already quoted:

"You really have a touch of style, my dear."

I repeat, it was the great Elaine Arthur! And she said Muriel had a touch of style!

And no young squire ever rose from his knees having received the accolade from the Black Prince himself upon the field of battle, in a brighter dream of future glories than surged at that moment in Muriel's hitherto unperturbed bosom.

She came home to Chicago all aglow with it and, thanks to a judicious reticence regarding her ultimate objective, which was, of course, the professional stage, she steered clear of the reef of parental objection. Indeed, her mother felt that there was something distinctly *chic* about it. It was a bit daring and conspicuous, and yet perfectly well-bred. And when young Morton Robins showed himself tumultuously aware of Muriel's candid charms, after a charity kermis she danced at upon the North Shore, and began paying her attentions that could only be taken seriously, even her husband acknowledged that she had been right.

But just as her mother was beginning to see herself at the end of her difficulties, Muriel discovered that

she was at the beginning of hers. She couldn't have said, with any very confident conviction that she was in love with Morton Robins. But this was more because she didn't know the precise standard value of the phrase, than because she didn't understand her own feelings toward him. She knew she liked having him in love with her—a fact which established a difference between him and all the other young men who had shown similar symptoms in times gone by.

Up to now, she had liked dozens of men precisely up to the point where they began looking at her in that new sort of way, contriving physical contacts with her which were meant to seem casual, and sulking when she gave them anything less than her exclusive attention. When they reached that point, she dismissed them as idiots and, except in the rare cases where they recovered under this treatment, had nothing more to do with them.

Robins didn't sulk, to be sure, but then she suspected she gave him little occasion to. It was curiously easy to forget about everybody else when he was around. Indeed, that statement might be put conversely. It was hard not to. She liked the way he looked and the way he said things; she liked even the touch of his hands, a thing she was finicky about; she hated to be pawed over, she always said.

Whether this constituted an authentic diagnosis of

true love, however, she didn't know. And there weren't any available authorities. It wasn't a matter you could talk about with anybody, and current fiction she distrusted profoundly. She felt she liked him as well as many of the young matrons of her acquaintance liked their husbands. But this didn't prove much, because few of these same young women seemed to be the exemplars of a wholly satisfactory existence. They were likely to be bored, fidgety, a bit cynical and, if they'd found anything at the end of their rainbow, it was a pot of gold and nothing more.

Moreover, her problem wasn't quite so simple as a choice between a great career as a stage dancer—Elaine Arthur's successor, for example, and a life of domestic bliss with Morton. If she wasn't sure that she could have either, neither was she sure she couldn't have both. Elaine herself was happily married.

She might marry Morton and then, as they turned away from the altar, spring her career upon him like a dynamite bomb; demand, in the manner of some stage heroines she had seen, an equal right with him to her own life and her own independence. But she couldn't make this seem quite fair, in the first place, nor quite practicable in the second.

Because—and here was the solidest of her difficulties—although her triumph at the kermis had been succeeded by others hardly less notable, although she

was enormously in demand for all sorts of entertainments got up by charitable amateurs, the thing as a profession remained as remote and inaccessible as Mohammed's mountain.

As she had day-dreamed the thing out, she would be summoned to the telephone some day, and an unfamiliar, thick brusk voice would announce the owner of it as one of the moguls of the theatrical world who had chanced to be among the spectators last night where she had danced and wished to know if she would consider an engagement.

With something tangible like that to fall back upon, she could confide her plans and her ambitions to Morton and her parents. There'd be scenes and ructions, of course; violent attempts to dissuade her. But Morton would tell her he loved her anyway and would wait as long as necessary. She'd make a brilliant success first on the professional stage, and then, once established, she'd divide her life equally between glory and domesticity, like Ethel Barrymore.

It made a good day-dream, but the essential part of it didn't come off. Often as she was summoned to the telephone, the voice was never that of the thick theatrical magnate talking around his cigar. The only way to get things started, it appeared, was for her to go to the mountain, and she hadn't the least idea how it was to be done. Where did this particular sort

of magnates have their offices? What were their names? Even if she could inform herself on these points, it would give her the wrong sort of start, she felt, to go to one of them, and tell him who she was and ask him for a job.

She astonished herself one night by confiding these difficulties, in one breathless outburst, to Walter Byrne, as she sat beside him at a dinner party.

Byrne was forty-five or so, happily—or at least not flagrantly unhappily—married, and he had the confident, sophisticated air which characterizes successful stock-brokers. She hadn't met him above half a dozen times in her life, but on those occasions they had got on very well together. He had started the ball rolling to-night by telling her how much he liked her dancing.

Somehow, the familiar phrases hit a raw nerve. "You feel you have to say that, of course," she observed curtly, "but really, you don't."

Then, realizing how pert and college-girlish it sounded, she blushed and stumbled into an explanation.

"It is awfully nice, of course," she said, "to have your friends applaud and say pleasant things. But after all, they're your friends and they'd say those things anyway. And if you're really trying to do the thing well, you want to be able to please people who don't know anything about you, nor care—people who are free to hiss if they want to."

He hesitated between the easy obvious compliment and a bit of plain truth.

"Well," he said, "the only people really free to criticize one's wares, are the people who buy them."

"That's what I want," she said. "That's the thing in the world I want."

This was a little startling, because the girl was thought to be as good as engaged to Morton Robins. But to see where she would bring up if given her head he concealed this feeling under a matter-of-fact question.

"Well, then," he asked, "why don't you go after it?"

"Because I don't know how," she told him. "I haven't the least idea even how to begin. Have you? Do you know anybody, or anybody who knows anybody who could—give me a chance?"

It was one of Byrne's harmless vanities that he knew all sorts of people.

"Why," he said, with just that quiet conservative air of confidence that made him irresistible in carrying through a bond flotation, "I should think that might be managed."

As a matter of fact, he did know just one young man to whom the esoteric mysteries of the theater were as plain as print—a young man, wise beyond his generation, always amusing and generally amused, who enjoyed, but did not boast, the acquaintance of stars,

managers, chorus girls and the young men behind the grills of box offices, equally and indifferently. The name of this young man was James Wallace.

"You will try?" said the girl. "Oh, I'll be so grateful!"

The intensity of it troubled Byrne a little. He hadn't any premonition, of course, how momentous his casual, half-stated promise was going to prove. His instinct went no further than to hint that it might have been just as well to profess ignorance for once. However, he was scrupulous about promises of this sort, and he called up Jimmy Wallace the next day and asked him to dine with him that night at the Athletic Club.

The same instinct, after he and Jimmy had had their cocktails, led him to alter his introduction of the question. He had meant to say: "I know a girl who wants to go on the stage as a dancer. How can she get a start?" Instead of that, he said: "How does a girl go into that business, anyway?"

"A particular girl," Jimmy wanted to know, "or girls in general?"

And something rather complex about his smile made Byrne say hastily: "Oh, girls in general, of course."

And Jimmy discoursed throughout the rest of the dinner, on how girls in general went on the stage and other fascinating mysteries connected with the world

of musical comedy. What a lot of fun Jimmy must have had getting all that information!

Byrne's partner, Hackett, happened in and he pulled a chair up to the table and enjoyed it, too. Only, he hadn't had nearly enough when dinner was over, and he wanted to know if there wasn't somewhere they could go to spend the evening.

Both of them saw that Jimmy hesitated. They didn't know how much the hesitation was to his credit.

"Why," he said presently, "I've an engagement to-night, with Arthur Brinton. We were going to run over a little musical comedy piece we've written, for a friend of ours who's in town. She played the lead in two or three of the Globe shows—Hazel Dering. Do you remember her? Well, she married some western mining millionaire, and they're here at the Blackstone for a week. She wanted to hear our piece —*The Only Girl*'s the name of it, and we arranged to go up there to-night."

Jimmy hesitated again. Was it fair? Oh, well, that was their lookout. And it really seemed as if Providence had delivered them into his hands.

"But," he went on, "if you wouldn't be bored, I'd be glad to take you along."

Bored! When here was some real inside stuff—a real actress whom both partners remembered perfectly as a very fascinating and dashing lady and a real musi-

cal comedy that hadn't been uncovered yet! Was Jimmy sure they wouldn't be in the way and that Miss Dering wouldn't mind? Could he answer for Brinton's feeling about the intrusion of strangers?

Jimmy's last trace of hesitation had vanished. He could answer confidently for all these things. And the three of them took a taxi down to the Blackstone.

II

Muriel's mother took her to the sea-shore for six weeks, ostensibly on her own account. The summer season, she complained, with all Muriel's gaieties, was almost as exhausting as the winter one. She needed to recuperate, and wanted her daughter with her as a companion. Actually, she was a little worried about the way Muriel's affair with Morton Robins seemed to be hanging fire, and she thought absence was the treatment indicated. There wasn't any real hitch, she felt sure. He was patently mad about her, and she as much in love with him as a well-bred young girl is supposed to be. Only she wouldn't submit to having an engagement formally announced, a wedding day set and preparations for a trousseau begun.

She hadn't any reasonable explanation to offer for this reluctance, merely reiterated that she wouldn't be hurried. And her mother, knowing how full of peril these informal understandings are—how likely

to lead to misunderstandings of the most vigorous sort, decided to give her a taste of absence from her lover and a chance to see how little she liked it.

It worked admirably. Muriel wrote and received thick letters every day, pined in a perfectly orthodox fashion and came home early in September, ready, apparently, to wear her ring and flaunt her happiness before the world.

Muriel had done a little stage management for their meeting. Morton wasn't to be at the train, where she'd be tired and dirty, and there'd be trunks and luggage and mother to look after, and father to say hello to. He was to come around after lunch. Then they'd have the world to themselves. And the implication was that the unqualified, unconditional "yes" that he was waiting for, would be forthcoming.

A bundle of letters was waiting for her in her room, but she glanced at them with a languid eye, since none of them could be from Morton, and until she'd bathed and dressed, she didn't even look to see whom they had come from.

But, when these operations were complete, she gathered them up in a bundle, carried them down-stairs and out into a veranda, and there, to while away the time waiting for her lover, she began listlessly to look them over.

The first one to sort itself out from the pack, be-

cause it was so different in texture from all the rest, was a commercial envelope with "The Only Girl" lithographed straight across the middle of it in pale blue letters, that her own name and address were typewritten through. Some freshly impudent form of advertising, she thought it, and only arrested a movement to toss it aside, when her eye fell upon the return card—"The Globe Producing Company, Globe Theater, Chicago."

And at that, she sat up straight with a little gasp, looked blankly off into space for a second, and then ripped it open. This is what she read:

"Dear Miss Scott:

"The Musical Comedy, *The Only Girl,* now in rehearsal under our management, has in it a small part for a dancer. The plot also calls for her to do two dances; one in the first and one in the second act. We will pay a salary of seventy-five dollars a week. Would you care to consider taking this part?

"Please let me know at your earliest convenience. In case you decide to take it, please report in person at the theater at the earliest moment, as rehearsals have been in full swing for some time and as the first performance is scheduled to take place in Milwaukee two weeks from to-night.

"Yours very truly,

"Joseph Lippsky, Manager,

"The Globe Producing Company."

She swung her feet around out of the hammock, crumpled the letter tight in her hand and stared wide-eyed down the drive—the drive where, any moment now, Morton might be appearing in his car.

And she couldn't have told you whether the emotion that had sent her limp and trembling all over, and made her diaphragm feel as if it had been turned to lead, was one of joy, or fright, or anger. The joy and the fright were natural and pretty equally mixed. The anger was a protest against the inscrutable ways of Fate. Why had such a thing as this come now instead of six weeks ago—now, just as she'd managed to forget her career, and to make up her mind to a life of domestic bliss with Morton?

She had spent a tremulous week after her conversation with Byrne, waiting to hear from him, how his effort in her behalf had prospered, and had then come to the conclusion that his offer had been composed of what she did not scruple to call "hot air." Still, she hadn't managed to dismiss it altogether from her mind, as she had philosophically ordered herself to do, and she had, to the worriment of her mother, kept Morton, poor dear, dangling about, uncertain whether he was an engaged man or not. She knew it was no way to act, as well as her mother did.

But the six weeks at the sea-shore had done the trick. For a fortnight past, she hadn't even dreamed

of the massed dim faces of an audience, and the brilliant glare of a battery of spot-lights, and the expectant murmur, and then the hush, and then the crashing outburst of applause. And now that she had forgotten it, here was the dream coming true. Oh, why couldn't it have come to her sooner!

She'd have known, if the three fatal Sisters had only taken her into their confidence, that the thing couldn't have happened sooner; that the skein of chance now entangling her feet just as she was about to rush into young Morton Robins' arms, had started spinning when she confided her ambitions to Byrne the night of the dinner. But for that confidence, Byrne wouldn't have called up Jimmy Wallace; Jimmy wouldn't have taken him and his partner, Hacket, to the private view of *The Only Girl* in Hazel's—and her husband's—apartments at the Blackstone. They wouldn't have learned from the artless Hazel that, thanks to Willy Lord's New York venture, the Globe theater lease was to be picked up for a song and that here was a chance, for say thirty-five hundred or four thousand dollars a piece, to have the fun of producing a musical comedy; hiring principals, magisterially attending rehearsals where they could smoke cigars all the time and say right out what they liked and what they didn't—the fun of doing all this and the satisfaction of coining

money at the same time. And if they hadn't known about this chance they wouldn't have taken it.

Also, if Walter Byrne's wife hadn't happened to remark to him at dinner one night, that Mrs. Scott and Muriel were expected back from the sea-shore in a day or two, it probably wouldn't have occurred to him that, in the excitement of becoming a full-blown musical comedy producer, he had forgotten all about the young lady who was the innocent cause of his starting on this primrose path.

Next morning, at the theater (It was really two o'clock in the afternoon, but they always call it morning until five o'clock. You may have noticed yourself that they call an afternoon performance a matinée)—next morning at the theater, he called a council of war with Hackett, Jepson, the producer, Wallace and Brinton. He said he had an idea. The Globe, in all its history, he said, had never attracted any real society patronage. His scheme was to write a small part for a dancer into the plot, give her two specialties, one in each act, and, if they could, get some well-known society girl like Muriel Scott, to take the part. He didn't know whether she'd do it or not, but if she did, she'd draw about a million people who never, otherwise, would think of coming to the Globe at all.

The others agreed to this, and Byrne wrote the

letter, but with a saving second thought, he told Lippsky to sign it. Then he and Hackett caught the fast train to New York to see about costumes.

Well, there you are. Fate really, you see, had done as well as she could.

The one imperative thing Muriel knew, as she sat there in the hammock, with that crumpled sheet of paper in her hands, was to decide instantly, one way or the other. Either she must go into the house now and telephone Lippsky that she would take the part or else she must tear up the letter, forget her career once and for all, and sometime before to-night, write a note declining it.

She was still telling herself that she must do one of these two things at once when young Morton Robins came rolling up the drive in his runabout and found her there.

Perhaps if she hadn't been quite so much in earnest; if she had had the technique of a finished coquette to fall back upon, and could have masked the conflict of feeling that was going on within her, or if he hadn't been quite so sensitively appreciative of her moods, his first rush might have settled the question then and there.

But her voice, as she greeted him, sounded flat to her own ears, and the hands she held out to him felt cold and lifeless, besides which there was a crumpled

wad of letter paper in one of them that got in the way. And though she accepted his kiss and returned it—well, there is no disguising a thing like that—it was as cold and lifeless as her hands. So that the first thing he said, releasing her from his embrace, just when he should have pulled her tighter into it, was, with a look of puzzled distress:

"Why, what in the world's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said, and then: "Oh, that," and handed him the crumpled letter.

She knew all the while that that was the wrong way to do it. She ought either to have offered it triumphantly as a thing for him to share her joy over, or else not have shown it to him at all.

"Oh, read it," she went on, for he was staring blankly at it, not knowing what he was expected to do.

She sat down on the edge of the hammock again, and he, standing before her and feeling more outrageously puzzled and misused every minute, spread out Joseph Lippsky's note and read it.

Had he been very wise and subtle—fifty years old, say, and three times married, he might even then have done the one thing that would have saved the situation—have taken the offer very gravely and seriously, as one which she couldn't be expected not to accept, and he'd have concealed the fact—concealed it so carefully that she'd be sure to notice—that the thing really

broke his heart. He'd have dismissed her tenderly, out into the blazing glory of fame. He would stay, humbly adoring, in the shadow. But, if ever she wanted him, if trouble ever came,—well, the chap in *The Bohemian Girl* had it about right:

"When hollow hearts shall wear a mask 'twill break
your own to see,
In such a moment, I but ask that you'll remember me."

If he could have got away with that, the chances are ten to one she'd have told him she didn't want glory, she wanted only him, and she'd have given him the kiss he should have had at first and all would have been well.

But he wasn't fifty. He hadn't the experience learned from those three wives behind him. He was just a young man, very much in love, with all his nerves on the outside. And what he did, when he'd finished reading the letter, was to laugh.

It wasn't a very good laugh, either, and he tried to explain it by saying: "What a perfectly preposterous piece of impudence!"

"I don't see anything preposterous about it," she said sharply.

Oh, why would it insist on going like that! She didn't want to be acrid and contentious. She knew there was a lot to be said on his side—wasn't sure she

"You'd be willing, I suppose, if I could turn into another Elaine Arthur over night."

didn't agree with him altogether. Because she hadn't come to any decision as yet. But the peculiarly infuriating blankness with which he stared at her, drove her a little further.

"It's this—this very kind of chance that I've been waiting for all summer."

"And was that why . . .?" he began.

"Oh, you knew," she interrupted. "We talked about it. You agreed—that a woman had a right to a chance to—be somebody herself. Not just her husband's wife. You knew I wanted to be a dancer."

He looked fastidiously at the paper in his hand. He was holding it as if its very contact carried contamination.

"I admit," he said, "I never thought of your—'career' "—he didn't mean to indicate those contemptuous quotation marks around the word, but he did—"as beginning at a place like the Globe."

"You'd be willing to have me do it, I suppose," she said, "if I could begin exactly at the top—turn into another Elaine Arthur over night. But you're ashamed to have me begin the only way a person possibly could."

"I take it then,"—and he didn't mean his voice to sound like that. All he knew was he was getting horribly hurt. But, as ill luck would have it, the pain didn't sound like pain, only like the nastiest sort of

sneering superiority—"I take it then you've made up your mind to accept this—wonderful offer?"

There was only one thing she could say after that, and she said it. A "yes" that was as contemptuously defiant as if she had snapped her fingers under his nose.

"And I suppose you will agree," she went on, "since you will be so horribly ashamed of me as all that, that our—that our"—the only way to keep her voice from breaking was to make it ring like a carver's steel over the edge of a knife—"that our engagement is"—she spread out her hands and shrugged—"finished."

"Evidently," he said politely, "that's what I am expected to say. Good-by!"

And in another thirty seconds, his car was flying down the drive.

III

The steel curtain at the Globe was raised half-way, showing the bare stage with its back wall of white-washed brick. Out in the unlighted auditorium—unlighted, that is, save by the disagreeably penetrating beams of a naked incandescent lamp on an iron standard that stood beside the piano in the orchestra pit, sat side by side in the back row, the authors, Arthur Brinton and Jimmy Wallace. They had their knees cocked up on the backs of the seats in front

of them, their hats pulled low over their eyes, and they were smoking Wheeling stogies so fast that they fairly sputtered. Over in a remote corner sat a very voguishly clad young lady in a hat listed about three degrees too far to starboard. Her street make-up was so heavy it would almost have done for the footlights, but Joe Lippsky, who was wandering vaguely back and forth in the transverse aisle at the rear of the house, paused every now and then to glance at her with carefully veiled admiration. She had applied to him that morning for a job in the chorus and, as he knew one of the show-girls was developing symptoms of a temperament, he had told the new applicant to wait and see Jepson when the rehearsal should be over. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon and the rehearsal had been going steadily since ten that morning.

Jepson himself, the director, in gray flannel trousers, tennis shoes and a shoft shirt, with a traffic policeman's whistle in his left hand, was ranging through the middle section of the empty house like a big tiger. When he roared, everybody, including Lippsky and the authors, and Max Weber, the featured comedian, shook in their shoes. Byrne and Hackett would have shaken in their shoes, too, only they were in New York looking after the costumes.

However, to quote a French philosopher, "No general statement is ever completely true—not even this

one." I must note an exception in the case of Dotty Blott, the smallest of the ponies. Dotty never shook in her shoes, because she never made a mistake. And when, once in a blue moon, Jepson made one himself, concerning the chorus maneuvers, she would come down into the apron and, with perfect *sang-froid,* point it out to him. She was four feet eleven inches high and she weighed eighty-three pounds, and the effect of her stopping Jepson in mid-career to explain to him, in her throaty, languid little voice, why something that he had ordered couldn't be done, was always electrical. However, we haven't time for Dotty just now.

It was the first of the property rehearsals and naturally it was excessively bad. You might not think that to have to take a real letter out of his pocket and extract it from its envelope and pretend to read it, instead of indicating the action in empty pantomime, would cause a veteran actor to forget every line he ever knew. But it is true that it does. Even the chorus, whom Jepson had been drilling for a solid month, blew up when they had to swing real canes and take off real beaver hats, and tangled themselves up like a bunch of recruits.

As I say, they had been working five hours and they hadn't got through the first act yet. Jepson might give them a half-hour for a bite to eat before he tackled the second act or he might not. Weber in the

wings was offering George Featherstonhaugh eight to five that he wouldn't. Jane Carrol and Angelique Arnaud, the two ingénue soubrettes, supposed by the plot to be twins and expected by the management to be jealous (it's the only case on record where such an expectation was not realized) sat side by side on the iron stairs leading up to their dressing-room, and looked so tired and hungry that Wallie Carter, the juvenile lead, volunteered for a perilous dash to the lunch counter at the mouth of the alley for sandwiches. He thought he'd surely be able to get back before Jepson should want him. Jane and Angelique remonstrated but not very hard.

The number Jepson was working on was one of those philosophico-Forty-second Street commentaries on existence, entitled *There's Nobody to Bother When You're All Alone,* to be declaimed by Daisy Benton, the leading comedy woman. The show-girls and chorus men were spotted about the stage and were supposed, at appropriate moments in the song, to give pantomimic illustrations of how disagreeable it might be at times when there was somebody to bother.

As there is only one thing in the world more difficult than to teach the rudiments of pantomime to a show-girl, and that's teaching them to a chorus man, Jepson had his troubles with this number even in the most favorable circumstances. To-day, Daisy, who

was forty-five years old and always a little more difficult than dynamite, had nailed her temperament to the mast and meant to go down fighting. She'd already issued one ultimatum and had two fits of hysterics. Just now, under a maddening guise of injured meekness—she knew she couldn't do anything to please anybody, but still she was doing her—sniff—best; she was getting up steam for a third.

Well, Jepson had been through the number seven times and was apparently prepared to go through it seventy more. Every minute or two the shriek of his whistle would cut the air, the pianist's hands would drop limply off the keys, the musical director, with a shrug, would wilt into a chair, and Jepson himself would come racing down the aisle and up over the runway that led across the orchestra pit. Sometimes he would explain what was wrong with a sort of terrifying patience. Sometimes, at the things he said, you could see the white-wash curl and blister off the bricks. It all depended on whether the mistake had been due to native stupidity, which couldn't be helped, or to inattention, which could and—so help him God!—should be.

Anyhow, it looked as if *There's Nobody to Bother* would go on occupying his attention for at least another half-hour, and there was a scene between Muriel

and the burglar-butler after that. So Wallie took a chance and bolted.

And then, of course, the thing went right. The whistle dropped into Jepson's pocket.

"That's very good," he said, when Miss Benton's number came to an end. "You did that capitally, all of you." Then, "Come along, Miss Scott."

"Yes," said Muriel, a little astonished that any sound came at all from her numbed throat, "I'm here."

"Well, get on," said Jepson.

Now there was just one thing in the world that kept Muriel from saying, perhaps a little plaintively, but in a tone of perfectly well-bred finality: "I'm sorry but I can't do anything now."

Hitherto, in a blameless life, the fact that she was all tired out, or that she had a raging headache, had always amply justified her in refusing to make any sort of exacting effort. Indeed, she had seldom been put upon this justification. Some solicitous eye had generally detected the condition, and the gently authoritative voice that went with it, urged much-needed rest and quiet upon her. But if this intervention did not occur, her own bare statement that she was unequal to any demand upon her, always sufficed to produce an immediate withdrawal of it.

If Jepson, when he had come storming into the

wings about an hour ago, to find out who was talking, had stopped in front of the rustic bench whereon she limply sat, and had said, "You're looking all fagged out, Miss Scott. You had better not try to work any more to-day," the walls of the Globe theater would have cracked and fallen as at the sound of Joshua's —wasn't it?—trumpet. But Muriel would not have been surprised.

She came by her headache honestly, to be sure. No one could pretend that the week that had gone by since Morton Robins had taken his stormy adieu that afternoon, had been easy. The fierce exultant excitement that had carried her through the first forty-eight hours, through a terrific scene with her bewildered and utterly outraged mother and another hardly less severe with her father, which had seen her over the terrifying strangeness of the first day at the theater—through a talk with Lippsky and another with Jepson and the nightmare of her first attempt to repeat the hastily memorized lines out of the thin little typewritten part they had handed to her—the exultant excitement of all that, I say, had ebbed away utterly.

The bit of acting she had to do which had worried her more than her two dances seemed to go pretty well; at least by comparison with the way the others were doing. They seemed very little concerned about getting any real feeling into their lines, whereas she

took to it naturally. If Jepson hadn't been so fussy about making her do things always in exactly the same way, go over to the other side of the stage, for instance, and sit down in a chair at precisely the same moment every time, she'd have got on capitally. He'd been perfectly polite to her, though—this hadn't struck her as ominous—and if she could have had a satisfactory rehearsal of her dances, she'd have had difficulty in finding anything reasonable to account for the feeling of depression that had been settling over her, deeper and deeper, every succeeding day.

None of the things she had dreaded worst, during her first pilgrimage to the theater, had even shown their heads as possibilities. Lippsky, who she supposed was the unbridled autocrat of the enterprise, had shown no disposition to act as the theatrical magnates in certain anonymous novels about the stage, supposedly written by actresses and dancers, were wont to do. Indeed, he was such a harmless, polite, rather overawed little chap that you couldn't imagine him with a wicked, brutal light in his eye, offering the shrinking aspirant for fame a shameful bargain as the price of it.

And while the other people of the company didn't stand around in the wings watching her work and burst into reluctant applause when she finished—that had been a silly day-dream, of course—neither did

they make her life miserable by any signs of hostile jealousy. They seemed a friendly lot who wished her good morning and good night very pleasantly and, for the rest, left her pretty well alone.

She hadn't had any chance, of course, really to dance at all. What seemed to be accepted at rehearsal as a substitute for music was provided by a rattle-trap piano and a sweaty young man in his shirt-sleeves who was evidently indifferent which of the keys his iron-clad fingers came down upon, as long as his rhythm followed the musical director's stick. Dancing—this was a phrase she never tired repeating to herself—was merely visualized music. And until there was some music to visualize, what could she be expected to do?

Like Jepson, the musical director seemed obsessed by a passion for certain mechanical details—how many steps she was going in this direction, just when she meant to pause and so on. But this was as broad as it was long, because it simply meant that when she really had an orchestra out there, and an audience, and her wood-nymph's costume on, she'd be all the more able to astonish them.

No, the thing that really made her blue was a sense of moving in a vacuum, or what was getting more and more like a vacuum every day. There was no response to anything she did—no bound back. Prob-

ably there wouldn't be until she got her real audience. And, in the meantime, more and more, she gave up fighting against it.

Anyhow, she had been thinking morosely as she sat there on her rustic bench, waiting for her moment to come, that this wasn't much like the thrilling, breathless, magical thing she had given up Morton Robins for. And then, she was hungry and limp, and her head ached, and when Jepson unexpectedly roared out her name like that, her impulse was, as I have said, to tell him that it was out of the question for her to try to do anything at all that day.

The thing that kept her from it was her sharp disgust—indeed, it came to downright shame—over the exhibition Daisy Benton had been making of herself. Whatever happened, she wouldn't do anything that seemed like that.

All the same, it was distinctly meritorious in her that she didn't.

Sustained by this idea, she made her entrance, and according to her lines, inquired of the burglar if this was where Mrs. Percy Richingham lived. She was supposed to go on and explain that she'd been engaged to come and dance for Mrs. Richingham's guests and to ask him a few questions about who they were. The humor of it was provided by the fact that the burglar, who was only masquerading as a butler, being

ignorant of the names of his involuntary hostess and her guests, is obliged to fall back upon an exceedingly grotesque imagination for his replies. At the end of the scene, Muriel says she wants to practise a little of her dance; whereupon she does it for the audience.

Well, she had got no further than "You're the butler, aren't you? Can you tell me . . ." when Jepson's big voice came surging around her ears.

"You're not up, Miss Scott."

She didn't know what this meant and she came inquiringly down into the apron to find out.

"You're not up," he repeated. "We can't hear you."

It wasn't exactly a shrug she made with her shoulders, but it came to about that.

"I'm afraid I can't talk any louder," she said.

"You'll have to," he said curtly. "There's no particular good in your wandering around on confidential terms with the scenery, if we don't know what it's all about. Go back to your entrance."

The glaring discourtesy of this (for he hadn't asked her if she'd mind going back, or even said he wished she would. He'd told her to.) she was willing to overlook as one of the rocks in the way to her career. But the injustice of it—she was sure she had talked as loud as Freddy France, who was playing the burglar—rankled.

She didn't show her indignation, to be sure, as Daisy Benton would have done. She did try to speak louder, but her tone was cold and lifeless and she was so slow catching her cues that France forgot his lines. She didn't know that that was why he forgot them, so it was a further outrage upon her sense of justice when Jepson broke into the scene again, coming clear down to the runway this time, to deliver himself with more emphasis.

"You're not giving me the scene at all, Miss Scott. Try to get a little pace into it. We aren't trying to see how long we can make the agony last. Go back to your entrance. Give her her cue, Freddy. Now wake up and play it!"

There is nothing like the fires of anger to show the difference between true breeding and the best French gilt imitation of it. Whatever furious retort came sizzling up in Muriel's outraged soul—for you are to remember that never, never in all her life, had any one spoken to her like that before—she remained a lady.

"I'm afraid I can't do any better," she said, with an icy politeness that would have won an apology, you'd think, from an irate truck driver, "but of course I'll try."

Jepson strode back into the house without a word, and the scene went on again. This time he didn't interrupt; just dropped down into one of the orchestra

chairs and waited—this was the impression conveyed to her mind at least—until the thing should be over. Of course, against a paralyzing influence like this, real dancing would have been out of the question, even if she had had real music to dance to, while with that abominable piano and the still more atrocious pianist . . . ! The one thing she wanted to do was to stop and scream and stamp, exactly as Daisy Benton had been doing half an hour before. Consciousness of the impulse frightened her, of course, into being a more frigidly perfect lady than ever.

"All right, go ahead!" called Jepson, when she had made a tragic exit. "Violet, Ivy and Algernon. Don't keep me waiting!"

But the blank stage gave him back nothing but a cavernous echo. The fact was that Wallie hadn't got back yet from the lunch counter.

"Miss Carrol, Miss Arnaud—Carter," Jepson called. Then, glimpsing the shrinking forms of Jane and Angelique in the wings, he roared again: "Carter! Where's Carter?"

Enter Jane and Angelique, looking about two feet high apiece. "It's our fault," faltered Angelique miserably. "We got him to go out for sandwiches."

The silence that followed was absolutely ghastly. Jepson drew in a long breath, plunged his fists into his pockets and strode up the aisle quite to the back

of the house. And it's the gospel truth that Wallace and Brinton shrank a little deeper under their hats and wouldn't have moved an eyelid for a dollar as he came steaming along. At the back wall, he turned and strode down again.

There was a bustle in the wings, and Wallie Carter, only thirty seconds late, that was the irony of it, dashed breathlessly on to the stage.

Jepson came up on to the runway. "All the principals," he called, "come down here."

They came down stanchly and formed in a double semicircle around him, to get their medicine—the comparatively innocent ones in the center, and the more flagrant delinquents out at the wings.

The chorus in this show, Jepson began by saying, was pretty good. But, if most of the principals didn't want to be shown up for a lot of two-spots, it was up to them to brace up and give him a rehearsal. If there was any one present who didn't mean to brace up and give him a rehearsal, any one who should ever again find it necessary to cause him another stage wait for sandwiches or anything else, he, she, or they, could walk out now before the rehearsal started in again and could allow their parts to be taken by more competent people. At this point in his harangue, he allowed ten seconds to go by in dead silence.

"All right," he said, turning back to the runway,

"go ahead. Violet, Ivy and Algernon! And, for God's sake, if you've got anything, show it to me. Clear the stage." Then, clapping his hands like a starter in a race: "Go!"

Muriel, back on her rustic bench, a bright flush of anger in her cheeks that no tradition of polite nonchalance could keep down, watched and listened to what happened after that, and almost doubted her eyes and ears. Because those three victims of what seemed to her a flagrant and capricious tyranny were out there; under the grim eye of the wielder of the knout, romping through their scene with all the zest in the world—bursting into jolly little peals of laughter, snapping their lines across with the clean whiplash smack of true comedy. They were as tired and limp and discouraged and hungry as she was herself, those two little ingénues (she suspected that Wallie had stopped to eat one of the sandwiches before he came back) and probably their heads ached as hard as hers. For five minutes she sat there in a daze. And then . . .

Well, after that, Muriel belonged in the company of those who, at some time or other in their lives, have gone the road to Damascus. The vision that began in that narrow, but intensely lighted spot out there on the bare little stage, widened for her in a divergent sweep until it took in the whole circle of life. Acting

—having a stage career, didn't mean, it seemed, doing something in an agreeable way when you happened to feel like it. It meant having something that you had painfully acquired the knowledge how to do—something that you could do, however you felt, when your wares were paid for and demanded. There was the difference between the eternal amateur and the eternal professional.

Well, and did it apply only to acting? Wasn't everything in the world like that? Was anybody ever any good in the world who couldn't put forth an effort, even if it hurt; stiffen up and do all he knew, even—she smiled a ragged little smile to herself at this—even with a headache?

The finale to the first act was over. Jepson had come across the runway again.

"That's better," he said. "You're getting up a little steam. Three forty-five, everybody—principals and chorus."

There was a rush for the dressing-rooms. Jepson, already in a chair, was kicking off his tennis shoes. But he arrested the action sharply as Muriel came up to him.

"Mr. Jepson," she said. "Can you give me another rehearsal some time to-day? I can do better than that."

Jepson had had a highly variegated career and there

must have been plenty of surprises in it, but I doubt if he was ever more astonished in his life.

"Yes," he said. "Of course. Oh, France! Wait a minute!"

At eleven thirty-five the next Thursday night, the last curtain started down on the first performance of *The Only Girl* in the old Stevenson Theater in Milwaukee. It shut down like a lid upon a seething caldron of highly diverse emotions and opinions. Hope preponderated over despair, to be sure. One scene upon which the authors would have bet their shirts had gone dead, another that nobody had expected anything from had been a riot, and so on. There was one indisputable fact; namely, that the better part of an hour had got to be either cut out or speeded out of the performance. And even a very inferior prophet, Muriel herself, for example, could foretell that there would be a titanic combat before it was settled where the cuts should be.

The outcome of this battle didn't concern Muriel. But the prospective duration of it did. She wanted to talk to Jepson for two minutes before her courage should have time to cool. And with a decisiveness she'd have been incapable of a week ago, she walked straight up to him in the momentary pause that preceded the opening of hostilities and told him so.

"Mr. Jepson," she asked, "how long will it take to get some one else for my part?"

He shot a practised glance into her eyes, then turned away rather thoughtfully and watched the grips striking the set. His glance had been to satisfy himself that her question was not the prelude to a fit of hysterics and, therefore, that she was worth listening to.

"You went better than I expected," he said. "You've improved a good deal in a week."

"But I'm still—dreadfully bad." It wasn't a question.

"You will learn, I think," he told her. "You've got a promising way of moving about," (this was Elaine's "touch of style") "and you've got intelligence and pluck."

"I didn't know until we started for Milwaukee," she said swiftly, "that Mr. Byrne had anything to do with the company. I thought I'd been hired on my merits. I know now how silly that was. If—if I decide to go on, I'll start at the beginning—get a job in the chorus somewhere. I'll go on with this, of course, until you can get somebody, but—but if you could get her before we open in Chicago . . ."

"I'd like to shake hands with you," said Jepson, suiting the action to the word. "You needn't worry about Chicago, nor about the rest of the performances

here, for that matter. If necessary . . ." (this wasn't altogether candid of him, but he was human) "if necessary, we can cut the part out altogether. But I hope you'll go on, Miss Scott, and I wish you all the luck in the world."

Then he turned bruskly away to more serious matters, and Muriel escaped to her dressing-room just as a skirmishing party, consisting of Daisy Benton, swept up to him and fired the opening volley of the engagement.

Safe in her dressing-room, the girl dropped into a chair, too dog tired even to begin to dress. If she'd been capable of introspective reflection just then, she'd have had trouble recognizing herself for the girl who had taken Elaine Arthur's casual word of praise with such tumultuous joy. Tired as she was—discouraged—humiliated, she was, in a queer way, happier than she had been that former time—happier, in a feeling, beyond her present powers of analysis, to be sure, that she was, somehow, more of a person than she had been then. She had stood the gaff. She could be roared at, blamed for things that weren't her fault, and go ahead and deliver the goods just the same. And, she supposed, that was what she'd do. There didn't seem to be much else that she could do now, now that she and Morton . . .

But, essentially, it didn't matter whether she went

on with stage work or turned to something else. The lesson she'd learned would be equally applicable.

Before she began to dress she leaned forward and scrutinized the heavily made-up face in the mirror. It didn't look like her own. Would it, even with the paint off? Would Morton . . .

She mustn't think about him. But, in spite of herself, two fat, futile tears gathered in her eyes, spilled over and ran streakily down over the rouge and powder.

"Stop it, you little idiot!" she said savagely. "You're a chorus girl now, that's what you are."

Well, in this one respect, she found she was a chorus girl—a chorus girl of fiction, however, rather than of fact. She found a man waiting for her at the stage door—a rather overawed young man, who didn't seem to know, when he saw her standing there in the doorway, just what to say or do, except to go on repeating her name and holding out his hands to her.

But presently, when they got out of range of the door-man: "I just want to say this," he told her. "I understood it all to-night. I saw you couldn't have done anything else. You were so wonderful . . ."

She pulled her hand out of his, looked wonderingly into his face, and then gave a little sobbing laugh.

"You—you thought I was wonderful! You weren't ashamed of me?"

"Don't!" he said, and looked away. "I'll never forget it as long as I live."

She reached out and took him by the shoulders. "Was I, really and truly, the—the only girl, to-night, to you, you know? . . . Well, then, see that you don't forget it. Because you have seen my first and last performance on any stage."

"Muriel!" he cried. "You don't mean that . . ."

But the way she flung her arms around his neck and kissed him, to the enormous edification of three of the ponies just then emerging from the stage door, ought to have convinced him.

THE REAL DOPE

THE phrase was not actively in the vocabulary of young Mr. Spencer Ayres. What he said he wanted was "the Truth." And, as he pronounced the word with all the fervor of not a day over twenty-five, his eyes glowing through the circular lenses of his tortoise-rimmed *pince-nez* (Does your imagination supply the black silk ribbon that went with it, or must I mention it?), you couldn't help seeing the capital letter he pronounced it with. Indeed, you fairly saw the shrinking lady herself and young Mr. Spencer Ayres' ruthless hand stretched out to strip the shimmering veils of illusion and romance from her shoulders. To reveal the truth in her true beauty, stark and unadorned—this was the mission which, in all sober candor, young Mr. Spencer Ayres had made his own.

His pretty married cousin, Bella—I may have told you about Bella—talked about the truth, too, though, as a less preoccupied eye than young Spencer's might have remarked, with a certain apologetically humorous reserve.

The man who said, "I see. What he's after is the

real dope about musical comedy," was Jimmy Wallace, whom Bella had invited to tea.

Bella was very pleased with herself for having thought of Jimmy Wallace. He might have been made to order for her purpose. Because in the first place he knew all about musical comedy. He had written one—well, I admit there's nothing in that. But, having written it, he had it already in the process of production. Rehearsals had begun, according to the newspapers (Jimmy was also a dramatic critic) about a week ago. And, knowing all about musical comedy, Jimmy possessed the added merit of being the sort of person you asked to tea. And when you invited him he came. Even though, as you could see from his smile of greeting, he had known perfectly well all along that you had asked him because you wanted him to do you a favor.

Really, Jimmy didn't in the least mind doing favors. Even when they were vexatious, he got a sort of ironic enjoyment out of them. And then—well, you never could tell what chickens were going to come home to roost. It was through doing a favor for a man named Byrne that he had found a producer for *The Only Girl*.

"Why I asked you to come," admitted Bella (but not crudely, the moment he came into the room, in an attempt to make a virtue of her necessary candor—

not until after she had given him his tea and a chance to eat two or three of the justly celebrated little cakes that always went with it) "why I asked you to come was to try to get you to do something very nice, indeed, for my cousin Spencer Ayres. You see, he's a writer. I suppose I ought to say, going to be, instead of is, but that sounds so horrid. And besides, he really has written two or three things. But mostly, he's getting ready to write something—oh, don't you know!—awfully good. He's been doing some special work on it at Harvard since he graduated, and he's written a couple of things that the *Atlantic Monthly* has almost accepted—seemed awfully sorry not to accept, I mean. Spencer showed me the editor's letters. And he's come out here because he thinks that in this rougher, cruder life of the West . . . Oh, I know I oughtn't to have said 'cruder'! He didn't. It was just his eyeglasses, and he can't help them, can he? Anyway, that out here, it would be easier to see the—the grim relentless truth of things, you know. He isn't going to do popular things. He thinks the magazines are dreadful—all those stories where the beautiful heroine and the handsome hero meet somewhere and overcome the villain and live happily ever after, he thinks they're wicked.

"He's got a little income—oh, awfully small, but enough, he thinks, to make him independent of—of

what the public wants. And he doesn't care how little he writes, so long as it's—true, you know, and—uncompromising.

"He's been out here now about two weeks, wandering around South Halstead Street and places like that—not finding quite so much material as he hoped, and getting desperately blue, poor dear. So I suggested he try to find something a little less depressing, like—well, the stage. And when I said I thought one could tell the truth about that as well as about anything else, he seemed rather taken with the idea. And so—here you are!"

It was at this point that Jimmy made his remark about the real dope. Bella's very accurate ear caught a note of dubiety in his voice.

"I know," she went on, "everything I've said about him sounds rather—well, as if he were the sort of person my husband would call a—pill. But he isn't, really."

The subject of this encomium came in just then, in need of tea—more precisely perhaps, in need of Bella's administration of it—very weary, after a long search for Truth along the middle reaches of South Halstead Street.

"If only it curved or bent a little," he wailed. "If the element of the unexpected only entered into it here or there . . ."

But he cheered up when Jimmy Wallace was identified for him as the author of a musical comedy now in rehearsal.

"Why, this is most fortunate," he said "—for me. Don't you remember" (this was to Bella) "my saying the other day, that I'd like to get some material for a really true story about the stage? My grandfather would have considered Mr. Wallace's dropping in to tea as a special providence."

Here Jimmy Wallace let go the thread of the young man's remarks to ponder upon a truth that had apparently escaped his observation; namely, that a young lady as attractive and as wise as Bella, while she made no bones of asking a favor, was chary of getting caught in the act of doing one. It was providence, or young Ayres' modern substitute for it, that was getting thanked instead of Bella.

Jimmy got his pay all right, in the shape of a confidential communication despatched by Bella's eyebrows, which appealed to him not to give her away. Jimmy smiled acquiescence back to her and picked up young Mr. Ayres' thread again.

"Of course," he was saying, "the present type of stage story—not that I am widely read among them—is, patently, as false as possible; done in what Meredith calls rose pink. The intent seems to be to carry the illusion of the theater behind the scenes and make

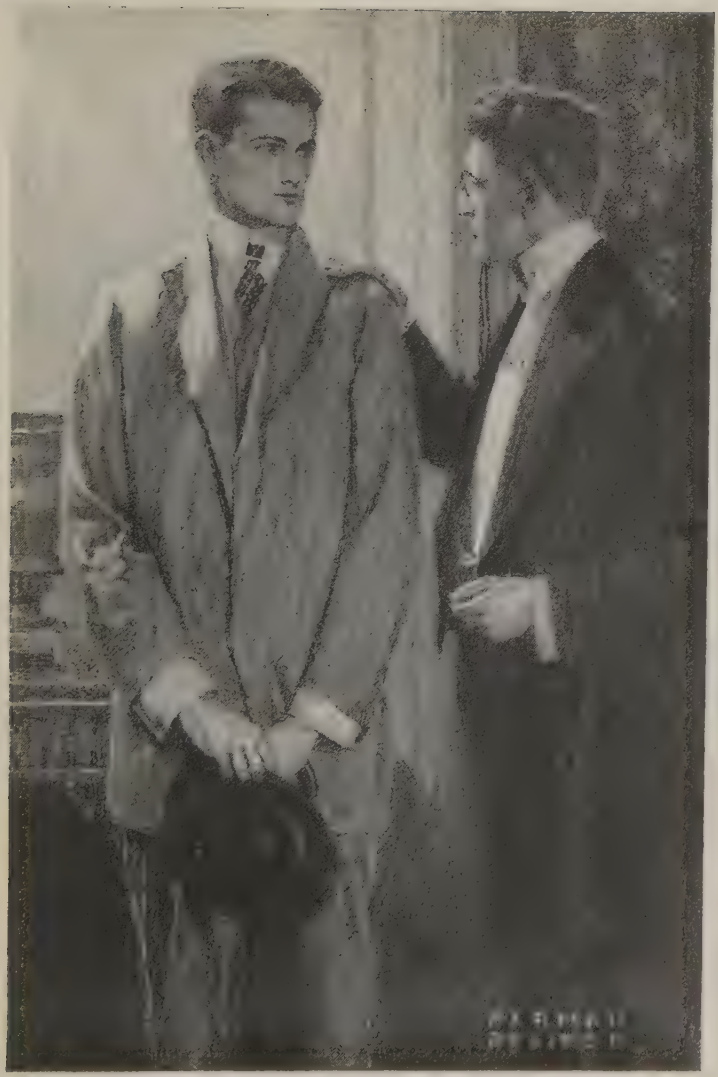
it appear that the players themselves are subject to it. Whereas I suppose the chorus girl . . . There I am, you see, talking as if I myself were a victim of the illusion! Why should a middle-aged woman be called a girl, except as a part of the conspiracy of romance? As I was saying, I suppose a chorus woman is as utterly without illusions as any person in the world."

"They aren't all precisely alike," said Jimmy. "I know one who's mad about Ibsen. But it wouldn't be safe to generalize from her."

The queer thing was, Jimmy reflected, that Bella was right about him. In some inexplicable way he missed being what you would call, without reservation, a pill. Something or other—his simplicity, his earnestness, his perfectly ridiculous inappropriateness to the task he had set for himself, intervened and saved him.

There was simply no telling what would happen to that young man if he adventured into the world of spot-lights and paint. In Bella's position of responsibility, he would think twice before launching so innocent a navigator upon such perilous seas. But Bella was pretty wise. Perhaps—Jimmy smiled a little over this—perhaps she thought something ought to happen to him.

"I'll take you round and introduce you to Jepson, our director," he told young Ayres. "He's the only



"I will introduce you to our director," he told young Ayres.

person who has any rights as far as rehearsals are concerned. If he tells you to drop in whenever you like and make yourself at home, why, then you're fixed."

They were rehearsing, on the night of Ayres' initiation, in a big barn of a dance hall up on the North Side—a place grim enough and stark enough and dirty enough to satisfy even the most realistic expectations. Irregularly disposed about the dusty floor were half a dozen big sofas, which, if you were indifferent or near-sighted enough, invited attitudes of the most abandoned repose. Also there were window-seats and rickety little folding chairs. Out of the middle of a decorated and mildly indecorous ceiling, done somewhere in the eighties, hung a big glass chandelier, which, apparently, had been cleaned and polished immediately after the decorators got through their work and had enjoyed a venerable immunity ever since. Up at one end of the room was a good-sized stage hung grotesquely and inexplicably with festoons of empty beer bottles.

Jimmy brought young Ayres in on tiptoe. Because at the moment of their arrival Jepson, with the principals circled around him, was occupying the stage reading the second act. The chorus had been called for rehearsal at nine o'clock, and though it lacked a little of that hour a few of the girls in their working clothes

were beginning to emerge from a door across the hall, which evidently communicated with some sort of dressing-room.

Their costumes were various. Some had on middy-jackets and bloomers, others bathing suits, a few more wore garments resembling the rompers you see little boys of three playing about in, and there was a residuum utterly nondescript. There was one girl in a jersey, with what looked like the lower third of a chemise projecting below it. Dotty Blott, according to her universal practise, wore overalls—and I pause to prophesy that some director, some day, will get an inspiration and have her wear them right through the performance. She's a lovely little dancer anyway, but no one who has not been privileged to see her dance in overalls has got the full effect she's capable of producing.

Well, and at last, just as Jepson was getting ready to dismiss the principals until to-morrow afternoon, there emerged from the doorway a slim figure in a blue gingham pinafore.

Jimmy Wallace had not been watching the door. His eyes were on the stage, where Jepson was reading the second act—his act—to the principals, and he had pretty well forgotten his companion. Otherwise he might have been able to tell young Ayres the biogra-

phies, in fragmentary and highly piquant form, to be sure, of perhaps a third of the girls.

And, up to now, young Ayres had been contemplating them with an apathetic eye, as they yawned and whispered and sprawled about on the sofas at the other side of the room. Thanks to the fact that he was rather near-sighted and they were a good way off and that the candor of their utterly undecorative costumes left no room for any lure at all, his theories about them had received no shock. And while this left him feeling intellectually triumphant, so that he was able to say to himself, "Of course! Didn't I tell you exactly what they were?" he was conscious of a distinct emotional disappointment. Had he been hoping secretly, all along, to find that he was mistaken? This was a disquieting idea.

But with the appearance of the girl in the blue pinafore, he touched Jimmy's arm and begged his pardon.

"I wonder if you could tell me," he said, "who that girl—that woman is; she's standing in the doorway—in the short blue dress."

Evidently Jimmy could tell, because when he looked around the girl waved at him. He waved back and made a beckoning motion with his head that brought her over toward them.

"You've picked a siren, all right," he said, in the

instant before she came within ear-shot. "That's Amber Lyston. I've known half a dozen lovers of hers, and they've all gone to the devil; drink, drugs, embezzlements. She's got skulls at her feet, that girl."

Ayres slid forward on his chair, prepared to rise and be duly presented. But Jimmy stayed quite comfortably just as he was. She held out a negligent left hand for the one he offered her and, coming up close, slid the other arm around his neck.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said.

He took the caress very much as a matter of course, but disengaged himself, all the same, rather abruptly.

"I didn't know you were going to be with us," he said. "Are you going back to work, really?"

She said she guessed so, and on Jimmy's asking her if she liked the show, said she hadn't heard any of it yet. This was her first rehearsal.

Then Jimmy said: "Meet Mr. Spencer Ayres."

Young Ayres got to his feet rather precipitately, having just made up his mind that on account of some etiquette or other he wasn't familiar with Jimmy did not mean to introduce him at all. He put, deliberately, a good deal of ceremony into his bow and his handshake. His principles were at stake, you see. He wanted to convince her, and incidentally Jimmy Wallace, that he held her in no less respect because her life had been what might be called irregular—lived in

rebellious defiance of the precepts of middle-class morality. He was broad enough, he hoped . . .

It wasn't until he straightened up from his bow that he got, really, a good square look at her within the focal distance of his near-sighted eyes. He'd seen the color of her hair, of course, from across the room. It matched her name (Jimmy might have suggested that her name matched it). Anyhow, that was what it was—pale amber. He had attributed it, of course, to dye, just as he had given paint the credit for the color of her skin.

And so when he straightened up after his bow and, as I have said, really looked, he just managed to check a gasp of pure astonishment.

Because not even the stiff incredulity of ignorance could resist the conviction that this was Nature's work —Nature, triumphantly asserting, as she does once in a while, that when she likes she can surpass art. The dye was never made that could reproduce the pale wonder of that hair, nor the cosmetic that could give that rose-leaf texture to the skin. The eyes he found fixed upon him when he looked up—he decided afterward that they were the color of a winter sky—had the impersonal candor in them of a child's. She didn't take the trouble to smile at all—surveyed him gravely a moment to see what he was like, and then turned back to Jimmy Wallace.

Jepson's big voice enveloped them just then. He wanted everybody on the stage. So she went away.

"But—but," stammered young Ayres, "she can't have been the person you meant. That's—why, that's impossible! She's a child."

"I've heard that offered as the explanation," said Jimmy Wallace.

II

Jepson looked a little blank over young Ayres at first, under an impression, caught from Jimmy's introducing his friend as a writer that the young man was a reporter. But as soon as this quite shocking misapprehension was cleared away—it didn't take long, because the first sentence of Ayres' horrified disclaimer contained the words "uncompromising," "verity," and "essential"—the director welcomed him most graciously and told him to make himself at home.

With the principals, as well as with Jepson, he soon began getting on very well. They couldn't account for him, of course. He wasn't a John nor an angel. Indeed, his avoidance of taxis, drinks and cigars suggested that he was poor. And yet the assiduity with which he attended rehearsals precluded the possibility of his having any sort of job, and his social status was clearly that of the quarter-deck.

But so long as they didn't try to account for him, it mattered very little. The men found him convenient to grumble to about one another's shortcomings; about lost opportunities in the book, the imbecility of the management and the misdirection of the director.

The two little ingénues—Jane Carroll and Angelique Arnaud—tried to be nice to him—Jane because her mother liked him (no débutante was ever as carefully chaperoned as Jane, nor needed it less. As a slave to duty, she could have disputed the preeminence of Frederick, the Pirate of Penzance), and Angelique because he was a friend of Jimmy Wallace's, and she liked Jimmy exceedingly. So the two of them would come down and sit beside him when they weren't wanted on the stage and talk about how hot it was and what a lot of trouble they were having getting their costumes made and so on.

He liked them all but Daisy Benton. Daisy was the leading comedy woman, and perhaps because her parts were always so vulgar she went in for being exceedingly ladylike off stage, except when she was indulging in the luxury of a kicking, screaming rage. She had heard that Ayres was going to write up the piece—exactly how or where she didn't know—and discerning that he was a high-brow, made violent efforts to keep her conversations with him on an appropriately high intellectual plane. The result wasn't

felicitous; he fled in dismay, and she decided that he was offensively superior.

I said he liked the rest of them; he was, anyway, grateful to them for their tacit assumption that he was one of them. But, with the best intention in the world, he found himself disappointed in them. They simply weren't so very interesting.

Max Weber and Freddy France tried, experimentally, to impress him by matching funny stories out of a line they both were famous for—stories so vivid, some of them, that even bartenders have been known to stop stirring up cocktails to listen to them. But they abandoned retailing these for his especial benefit when they saw that, while not greatly amused by them, neither was he shocked.

The fact was that having grown up among the sober-backed volumes of an old-fashioned gentleman's library and being thoroughly acquainted, therefore, with the *facetiæ* of the masters of this literary specialty from Ovid to Balzac, the highest flights—or, if you like, the vilest depths that Max and Freddy were capable of—seemed childish.

And there was such a fascinating lot of possibilities—ideas they might have had—an attitude toward the rest of Society—hostile, class-conscious, esoteric. Splendid gypsies! (He had heard the phrase some-

where.) That's what they might have been. But—they weren't.

And those two little ingénues! He had read *Fifine at the Fair* all over again, just to get the soil of his mind properly harrowed for the sort of seed he expected would be sown in it. And then, ready for anything, he was introduced—to Jane and Angelique!—Jane, with her chaperon and her sense of duty; Angelique with the disposition she had been prophetically named after—two nice, pretty, well-behaved children.

A logician could have compelled him to admit that disappointment is an emotion to which the seeker after the Truth should be immune. To him, of all persons in the world, the fact that a fact is a fact should be its supreme and only justification.

It might have been easier for him to feel that way but for the phrase Jimmy Wallace had applied to Amber Lyston the night of his first rehearsal. "She's got skulls at her feet, that girl," is what Jimmy had said. And he, under the impulse of his first good look at her, had cried out that this was impossible. As rehearsals went on and he saw her every day, jogging lazily enough through her part in the chorus maneuvers, stretched out between times on one of the big greasy sofas, his mind always registered anew the conviction that there must be something wrong with

Jimmy Wallace's information about her—a grotesque mistake somewhere.

Alone in his room, thinking things over, sorting out the day's rather meager stock of impressions, he generally reversed his conclusion. Jimmy had stated explicitly that he had known half a dozen of the girl's lovers and that they had all gone to the devil. A man couldn't be mistaken about a thing like that.

Of course the obvious thing to do was to ask Jimmy for details. But for a reason he avoided trying to define—because, unless very cautiously stated, it might seem to be that he didn't want the derelictions established—(a nice situation for a seeker after the Truth to find himself in!)—he forbore, when with Jimmy, to bring up the subject.

The thing he really wanted to do was to get the girl's story from herself; drop down casually beside her on one of those sofas during the long interval in the second act when the mediums have nothing to do and acquaint himself, if not with the facts of her life in detail, at least with her intellectual point of view.

There was no reason for not doing this except that he couldn't. Alone in his room he could figure out promising looking conversational openings. But they always broke down into an amorphous dust and blew away at his first sight of her.

He didn't, as a matter of fact, have anything that

you could call a conversation with her until a little before the company was due to trek to Milwaukee for the purgatorial week of rehearsals and try-out performances which were to precede the real opening in Chicago. They were rehearsing now at the Globe, mornings and afternoons when there was no matinée, and one day, in the dark of the auditorium, Amber came and sat down beside him. She might have mistaken him for some one else, or might simply not have taken the trouble to ascertain who her neighbor was before she sat down. He didn't think she had picked him out deliberately.

Anyhow, it was the best chance he had had, and he racked his mind desperately for a conversational gambit casual enough not to startle her, yet not so commonplace as to preclude the possibility of their getting somewhere. It was no good. He couldn't think of a word. And of course, after the first half minute or so, it was too late to say "Good morning," or "How do *you* feel to-day?" or anything like that.

Presently Max Weber came out on the stage and began a sort of vaudeville specialty of his, which, to Wallace's disgust, Jepson had allowed him to interpolate. After enduring a minute or two of it in silence, Amber spoke.

"I hate that slob," she said.

She hadn't looked around at young Ayres as she

said it. But there was no one else who could have heard. She must have spoken to him.

He swallowed twice, then:

"I don't find him very amusing myself," he observed.

"He's as funny as a hearse," said Amber, still without taking her eyes from the stage. "And that line of jazbo he pulls with us mediums in the first act makes me sick."

Uncertainty as to the precise meaning of the word "jazbo" kept him from replying to this observation. But the silence from then on through the ten minutes or so that she sat there beside him had a different quality. By some mysterious process of interpenetration he felt that they were getting better acquainted all the time, just sitting there. She hadn't changed her position at all. She was casting no sidelong glances his way. But a current of some sort had established its connections between them and was flowing palpably.

When she got up to go back on the stage she stopped in the aisle long enough to ask him a question:

"Do you go to Milwaukee with us?"

He had thought of going to Milwaukee, and only last night had definitely decided against it. His experience with musical comedy was not panning out a high enough percentage of the virgin gold of Truth to

warrant the drain upon his slender resources that such an excursion would involve. But the alchemy of the little silence between them had changed all that, and his reply to the girl's question was that he thought without doubt he should go to Milwaukee with the company.

He had risen, automatically, when the girl did. Now when he turned back to take his seat he saw Jimmy Wallace sitting alone three or four rows back. Jimmy patted the seat beside him, and young Ayres, with a reluctance which it took him a minute or two to account for, acted on the invitation.

"Getting the Siren doped out, are you?" Jimmy wanted to know.

Ayres couldn't get away from the fact that his reply, "We barely exchanged a dozen words," was disingenuous. But he justified it by explaining to himself that since he was now on the track of some first-hand knowledge about her, he didn't want his observations vitiated by Jimmy's prejudice.

III

The five o'clock train for Milwaukee the next Monday afternoon carried a special coach for *The Only Girl* company. The management and the more important of the principals bought seats in the parlor

car, but the chorus, the orchestra, including the director; the carpenter, the electrician and the property man, together with a sprinkling of minor male principals, spread themselves out comfortably in the coach, amid an impressive litter of bags and suit-cases, and prepared to pass the time in whatever manner seemed the most amusing.

Most of the men smoked; three or four little groups of men and girls settled themselves to poker (Five is the maximum number that can sit in one game in a day coach. You turn over one seat, and the fifth member of the party sits on an up-ended suit-case in the aisle. There are accommodations also for six onlookers to each game, four hanging over the backs of adjacent seats and two sitting on the arms). Most of the girls who weren't playing, or looking on, read magazines, or took naps.

But Amber Lyston did none of these things. She declined numerous invitations from the poker players to "sit in," and so pointedly discouraged the intention of Big Dave, the pianist, to have what he would have called friendly doings with her that she finally frustrated it. So he joined the gallery of one of the poker games.

"That's some hang-over Lyston's got this morning," he observed. "She's a festive object to talk to, is she not? Yes, she is not."

"It isn't like her to carry a hang-over," remarked one of the girls. "I've seen her stewed a thousand times. But never with any katzenjammer the next day. And me with my head ringing like a fire-bell!"

"It isn't booze this time," another of the girls affirmed. "She's been having a row with her friend—Archibald de Montmorency, whatever his name is."

This was not the name of the gentleman in question, nor even an authentic nickname, merely an expression of mild disregard, but it identified him with the little audience.

"She's always having rows with him," said somebody else with a yawn.

"Not like this," insisted the former speaker. "I hear she's walked out on him."

"More likely he's tied a can to her," said Big Dave. "She's been getting gay with that tango teacher down at Steve's, and her Archibald's got wise."

"And she's been telling you all about it, I suppose." This got a laugh. Evidently Dave's repulse and strategic withdrawal from Amber's vicinity had not escaped observation.

"You're a wise little Jerry, all right, Dave," the other girl went on. "But you want to listen and get this. Lyston never got a can tied to her yet. When there's any canning to do, she does it.—I'll open for ten cents."

The subject of this conversation, across the aisle and only three or four seats down, had overheard most of it with a dully indifferent ear. In another mood she would have been capable of a hawklike pounce upon the gossiping group that would have sent them scuttering for cover.

To-day she didn't care. She sat slackly in her seat, neither reading nor taking a nap nor giving attention to the gossip across the aisle, not even seeing the prosperously complacent suburban landscape going by outside the window; just waiting for the next thing which should happen. Generally when Amber Lyston waited in just this quiescent state, something did happen. Although she had never made this general observation for herself.

This time, surely enough, at the end of fifteen minutes or so it did.

Fifteen minutes was the lapse of time required to convince Spencer Ayres that the parlor car on this trip to Milwaukee was a barren, unpromising place for the prospector after Truth, and that perhaps there would be more of what Jimmy Wallace called "the real dope" available in the coach ahead. Having made up his mind to this, and conscientiously conquered the growing shyness which had been gaining upon him rather than abating during the past week, he went into the coach, squeezed by a poker game, although there

was enough atmosphere about it to have kept a realist busy rather more than two hours, and paused presently beside a girl with amber-colored hair and a rose-leaf face. Her hat and jacket were in the luggage rack above her, her suit-case under her kneees, her bare hands lay limp in her lap, her pale mouth looked a little slack, and the outlines of her eyes were blurred a trifle, but not flushed as if by recent tears.

She glanced up at him and moved one hand enough to invite him to take the vacant seat beside her. And he, stammering out a "May I?" took it. Then the girl drew in and released a long slow sigh. The next thing had begun to happen.

Like many another drama, it lacked an audience. There were spectators, to be sure. The nearest poker game stopped long enough when it saw where Spencer Ayres was sitting, to giggle and say, "We have with us to-night" and "Welcome to our city"—a few things like that.

But all they could have felt, even if they had been near enough to hear the conversation, would have been a mildly amused sense of the incongruity between Lyston and a high-browed innocent like this friend of Jimmy Wallace's.

Jimmy Wallace would have seen more in it than that. But not even Jimmy—nothing less than omniscience itself would have caught the whole thing.

If such an omniscient eye had been turned on Amber as she made the little gesture which invited Spencer Ayres to sit down beside her—an eye that could see clear down into the ganglion of instincts, impulses and desires which a careless person might speak of as her soul—an eye that could see the pictures photographed upon her memory of the last two weeks and run them over as one runs over a reel of cinema film—an eye enjoying such an advantage, as I say, must have twinkled with ironic amusement.

For the past month or so the man who a few minutes back had been referred to across the aisle as Archibald de Montmorency had been growing unsatisfactory; growling when he should have purred, talking morosely about the war and something he called a panic when he ought to have been entertaining; becoming, in the middle stages of intoxication, quarrelsome and suspicious instead of affectionate (and there was no valid ground for his suspicions, either. The tango teacher, to be sure, was no myth, but Amber really cared nothing about him — had barely flirted with him at all), suspicious about nothing, and, in general, a nuisance. And Amber, who couldn't bear to have her fur rubbed the wrong way, had, after a couple of admonitory scratches, packed and changed her address with no notice given. And, as a necessary

consequence, gone back to work in her natural element, the chorus.

The man, in a rage of his own, had gone away, too, and so didn't discover for several days that she had fled. When he looked her up to see how the medicine of his absence had worked and found that it hadn't worked at all, she having run away from him before he had had a chance to run away from her, it naturally became immensely desirable to him to get her back. It had not occurred to him that she would return to the chorus, and he went off on a wrong trail after the tango teacher. And with every day of non-success and the intoxication with which he tried to console himself at the end of it, the girl he knew was ruining him and had begun to hate, became the object of a fiercer desire — desire with hate about evenly mixed in it. Or if not hate and desire, for these are first-rate emotions, at least as good an imitation of them as his third-class nature could trump up to impose upon him with.

He found her the Sunday night before the departure for Milwaukee, and managed, under a pretext, to get into one of the two tiny rooms which constituted what she called her apartment. And after trying to scold her and forgive her, and finding that these tactics wouldn't work, he got out a revolver with the an-

nounced intention of killing her. Probably for a while both of them thought he would. She did, anyway, and begged for her life, promising to love him again as she had really loved him all along. This wasn't acting. Amber never could act at all. For just the moment she meant it.

But then, having convinced him, and felt that the hand she had laid her face against had slackened its grip on the revolver, a reaction seized her, germinated perhaps in a melodrama she'd seen not long before, so that she snatched the revolver from his slack hand, threw it out the window and ordered him to begone. He became very repentant after that and professed the most slavish adoration for her, but without altering at all the terms of her ultimatum. So that finally, in tears, he had said that he would go now, but that once outside her house he would go around under her window, find the revolver and shoot himself with it—a course which she earnestly urged him to follow to the last detail.

He did go, and presently she heard the shot he had threatened her with, whereupon she threw herself upon the couch, sobbed tempestuously for a while, finally stole down-stairs herself, let herself out the back door and, shuddering with horror, made her way to the scene of the supposed suicide. Only to find that there was nobody there. The shot had had no

deadlier result than the bad quarter of an hour she had just been through. So she cursed him eloquently and went up to bed, where she slept the untroubled sleep of a child of six.

Somebody had told her that the call next day was for the two o'clock train, instead of for the five o'clock, and she packed and made ready for her departure to Milwaukee before this bit of misinformation was corrected, with the result that she found herself with three idle hours upon her hands in the afternoon. Whereupon she did what ninety-nine out of a hundred chorus girls would do in such circumstances—went to a movie show.

The play she stumbled upon was a featured production of *The Christian,* by Mr. Hall Caine. And again, as nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand chorus girls would do, she, in her own vernacular, ate it alive. It satisfied her just as her frenetic sobbing the night before, over the man who was supposed to have shot himself outside her window, had satisfied her. She identified herself with Glory Quayle and wallowed in repentance at the knees of an austere ascetic who, while he resisted her unregenerate wiles and condemned her transgressions, yet loved her passionately all the same.

But, though she found no difficulty in identifying herself with Glory, she was, for a while, stumped to

find in her own circle of acquaintances, an equivalent to the priest. She must find some one to make the thing complete, and she was incapable of inventing him.

And then, suddenly she thought of the only man she knew who had never called her Girlie, the only one who had ever talked to her ten minutes without getting his hands on her in a casual or pseudo-casual caress—Jimmy Wallace's friend—what was his name? Spencer Ayres.

She didn't at all reach the intellectual conclusion that this was an innocent. She had no intellect to reach conclusions with. But, like a well-fed angora cat, she possessed an instinct for what, in any given mood, she wanted.

So now you know the preliminaries. And perhaps, seeing her sitting there at the end of a twenty-four hours during which she had faced death, passionately lamented a lover whom she had sent to his, and experienced the religious ecstasy of conversion from sin, sitting there, a little sated perhaps, and a little slack, like, once more, an angora cat who has just slept off before the fire the effects of a night out; waiting without impatience for the next thing that was to happen, but recognizing, with a little sigh of contentment when Spencer Ayres sat down beside her, that it had begun to happen—looking at her like this, perhaps you will

smile, too, and forgive me the story I felt you could not appreciate the situation without.

Her sigh, as I said, was of pure contentment. But her instinct told her that it sounded pathetic, and pathos was her cue just as it had been Glory's.

He took it that way, for he looked around at her with concern. "You must be dreadfully tired," he said. "I really had no idea before how laborious rehearsals are. It must be a pretty hard life when all's considered.

"It's a dog's life," she said. Then, after a pause, a little raggedly and with averted face, she added: "But it isn't work that makes it like that. I wouldn't mind work — I'd work my hands off if I could just . . ." And one of her exquisitely manicured hands slipped limply off her lap and lay unguarded on the seat between them.

It wasn't acting, the conscious assumption of a mask —a deliberate presentation of a character other than her own; she would have been as incapable of that as of reading Bergson. Quite sincerely she wished just then that she were a poor but honest working girl upon a moral eminence that Big Dave, the pianist, for example, would never have dared attempt. And, feeling the pathos of this, she wanted the man beside her to comfort her a little. That was why she dropped her hand within such easy reach of his own. But the

fact that he didn't take it immensely helped the scene along. It brought very vividly back to her mind the fifth reel of *The Christian.* Here was a man who could be stern! She sighed again. She was having a heavenly time.

But young Ayres, very much on the contrary, was not. Here was the seeker after Truth fairly upon the road to discovery. Here was his subject in his laboratory just waiting for the touch of his vivisector's scalpel to reveal all sorts of grim realities. But what had happened to the vivisector? Instead of that formidable personage, with a mind illuminated to a million candle-power by the cold light of pure reason, sat a thrilled, breathless, thoroughly distracted and very young man.

He had heard of certain experiments in the measurement of lenses which the warmth of a human hand within reaching distance would utterly invalidate. Well, there was a human hand now, lying beside him on the car-seat, and the mere knowledge that it was there was playing the very devil with the psychic measurements he meant to take. He locked his jaws to keep his teeth from chattering. That is why he looked so stern.

"There are such a lot of smug stupid brutes in the world," he managed to say in answer to her outburst. The words didn't mean much of anything, but they

reeked with a feeling he couldn't disguise, and once more they gave Amber her cue.

"You said something, then," she answered wearily. "Brutes is right. Always ready to misunderstand a girl, spread a lot of dirt about her. Anybody thinks they've got a right to insult a girl like me. As soon as they see her wearing anything new they begin to ask who her friend is that paid for it."

Of course the agonizing trouble with young Ayres was that he could be neither wholly one thing nor the other. In spite of the thrills that were surging over him in waves, there was an uncorrupted corner of his mind which registered the observation that this burst of Amber's sounded fishy and directed him to note that the rings on that tantalizing, unguarded hand were more than she could have bought in a lifetime—out of her salary.

If only he could get her to see that she needn't lie and protest—realize that he was not one of the pharisaical man-pack who would hound a woman out of society, make a pariah of her, merely for yielding, unwillingly perhaps, to their own base desires! Once she understood his point of view she would, he hoped, confide in him without fear; give him the Truth he sought and make him her friend at the same time.

Inspired with this laudable purpose and with more confidence than he had felt before in any of his con-

versations with her, he pulled up his knee in the clasp of both hands, fixed his eye upon the toe of his shoe and set about explaining a point of view which he held, he told her, in common with liberal-minded persons all over the world. It might be called socialistic, but it was not limited at all to Socialists.

In the first place, every person's morals if not wholly determined were, at least, strongly modified by the economic stratum in which he lived, the economic pressures to which he was subjected. The delusions which the capitalist class sought to impose upon the world in the guise of an abstract, heaven-inspired, invariable morality, were merely the particular set of delusions which were of the greatest economic advantage to that class.

It was plain, then, that for a working girl to reject the great delusion, refuse to permit herself to be exploited by the capitalist class and contrive, instead, to live parasitically upon individual members of that exploiting class, was a sign, not of depravity but of intelligence.

In other words, a girl who refused to work her hands off, as Amber had suggested, in some frightfully underpaid industry; a girl who took a rich lover instead, or even a succession of them and compelled them to support her as they supported their own women had nothing whatever to be ashamed of.

It was a speech Bella or any of her friends would have yawned over and perhaps have replied to that they had read *Mrs. Warren's Profession* a long time ago. But it didn't have that effect on Amber!

She had listened complacently enough to his preliminaries, just as she would have listened to a recitation of couplets from the *Mahabharata* in the original Sanskrit. But his use of the word "lover" shocked her into incredulous attention. That word, among people of her sort, is absolutely taboo. Not even Big Dave, outrageous Rabelaisian as he was, would have dreamed of uttering it in her presence. So, with the red burning hotter and hotter in her cheeks and her frosty blue eyes wide open, she stared at him speechless while he completed the utterance of that utterly abominable idea.

When it was finished young Ayres, in his innocence, had done what never had been done before. He had genuinely shocked Amber Lyston!

She had, one might say, a speaking acquaintance with about every sort of baseness the dregs of humanity are addicted to. She could laugh with unforced hilarity at stories which would have made Queen Elizabeth blush. But that any one could be wicked enough to attack goodness as such; could be basely cynical enough to declare that the persecuted heroine of the melodrama is a fool for her pains, opened an

abyss that she started back from the brink of in perfectly honest horror.

So when young Ayres turned around to look at her he saw, to his bewilderment, the flame of an unfeigned anger in the rose-leaf face, and tears—real uncontrollable tears of chagrin gathering in the wide blue eyes. All she said—but it was in a tone that would have withered an india-rubber plant—was, "My Gawd!"

After all, the essential thing about young Ayres was that he was a gentleman. He was in the habit of speaking derisively about the breed, as any true socialist will do, but no ante-bellum representative of a first family of Virginia could have experienced a more chivalrous regret than he over the appalling blunder he had made, nor set about repairing it with a more contrite conviction.

He had not the faintest misgiving as to where the blunder was. The only thing that could cause a girl to be shocked like that over his comparatively innocuous speech, was an innocence as flowerlike as her face. All the rest of it, the rings, the expensive clothes, the stories Jimmy Wallace had told him, must be accounted for somehow — he didn't know how, and he didn't much care—without putting a stain upon or marring the perfect bloom of that.

So mastering his consternation as best he could,

very gently, very sweetly, out of the best and simplest and deepest that was in him, he made her his apologies.

If you have really understood Amber, it will be superfluous to tell you that she did not, in the first place, reason out what the conviction must have been that led to his sudden change of attitude. She never said to herself, "He thinks I'm innocent." She simply became for the time being as innocent as he thought her.

She went on crying for a while, softly and forlornly, into a highly-perfumed little handkerchief, but gradually she allowed herself to be comforted, and before they got into Milwaukee (the run takes two hours) he was the best, the only true—pal she ever had had.

As for young Ayres, the tumult of his emotions when she enforced this declaration with a warm palm-to-palm clasp of the hand whose rings had led him so far astray was the same old tumult that every man has felt once and, in its chaotic freshness, only once.

Amber had a new thrill, too, because she was a new Amber. She'd never been innocent like that before—not since she was six years old.

Only. . . .

IV

Bella was not the sort of young woman who flies into a flutter when confronted by a phenomenon of a disconcerting sort and in a volley of hurried ques-

tions demands to be told, instantly, whatever on earth can have happened.

So when young Ayres came in upon her three or four days before she expected him back from Milwaukee, and one look at him told her that he was a radically changed man from the one she had said good-by to less than a week before—unmistakably a man who'd been hurt pretty hard by something—she devoted her whole attention at first to seeing that he had his tea the way he liked it, that he was comfortably disposed in a chair he fancied, and that he saw he needn't be afraid of questions—at least not of the kind it would be hard to answer. She managed two or three of the casual sort in order to avoid seeming tactful, which to her mind was the most irritating form of tactlessness there was. Then she waited.

It was along in his second cigarette that he said, with a sort of smile that was new to her: "You must have been laughing at me, too—smiling anyway—all along."

Then he put down the cigarette and let himself go back rather limply in the big chair, his hands resting on the arms of it.

She reached out and patted the nearest one. "There's a difference," she said. "We smile over things we like—things we, perhaps, a little bit envy. In that way I have smiled, yes."

Whereupon, after a long breath and the prefatory observation that she was a dear, he told her the whole story

At the end of it he went back to the distinction she had made at the beginning.

"Of course the rest of the company, chorus, principals, everybody—they didn't smile. They laughed, —all but those two nice little ingénues—as of course they were entitled to. Balzac himself would have laughed at the spectacle of a young, opinionated, very superior sort of ass—oh, I know—like me, coming to study those people and write the real Truth about them, and then being such a fool—just about the oldest kind of fool there is in the world. And I suppose the girl must have laughed, too—must have been laughing all the while. And yet, even now . . ."

"Isn't it possible . . ." Bella asked; "I mean, are you quite sure that she really is—what you thought her at the last?"

It wasn't an unnatural question, because he had not gone far into detail concerning the final scene of his disillusionment.

"Oh, there's no doubt about that," he said. "The man they speak of as her 'friend'—I saw them together, you know—was of a type that would make it clear if nothing else had; a satyr, with a kind of contented leer when I saw him, that . . .

"They'd quarreled, it seems, back here in Chicago. It was because of that she joined the chorus. But he followed her finally, and they made it up. And of course Wallace knew what he was talking about when he warned me about her in the beginning. Only . . .

"Well, I suppose the only logical thing, the obvious thing to think is that she was laughing all the time as hard as the others—enjoying the spectacle, remembering things I said and did, to scream over with her subsequent companions. It's natural to suppose that that's what she was doing all through those four days when I was in—"

He broke off short, but seemed to want to go on, and Bella prompted him. "In love with her?"

His face winced. "They've given that word a bad taste," he explained, "but as you mean it, yes."

He waited a minute, then went on, leaning suddenly forward in his chair. "And yet—and yet I can't believe that—that she was laughing all the while—even now."

His own ear told him how much the ragged edge of pain in his voice must have revealed and the quick response in his pretty cousin's face confirmed it. He dropped back and added with the little smile she was getting accustomed to:

"Yes, it went as deep as that. There has to be

some one, somewhere, whom I needn't pretend before."

Bella studied a teacup. "It isn't," she began—apologetically as always when she departed from the hard-glazed surface of things—"it isn't always the logical, obvious things that are best worth believing, is it? And if an—instinct tells you to believe something else . . . What does it tell you to believe?"

He took his time about answering.

"Why, I'd like to think," he said at last, "that during those four days she really was—all there is of her really was—just what she seemed to be. I suppose she couldn't stand it any longer than that. And if that's true—what I like to think—why, she's welcome to laugh now, if she likes."

And this time, when he smiled Bella frankly dried her eyes.

The practical suggestion came to her almost immediately after that that he had got out of his adventure precisely what he had set out to get; a little, anyhow, of what Jimmy Wallace would pronounce to be real dope. Perhaps, later, she would point this out; not, decidedly not, to-day, but in a fortnight or a month as the progress of his recovery seemed to indicate. In the meantime:

"You're staying to dinner with us, of course," she said.

HOW TO APPRECIATE HENRY

IF Henry Hutton's good humor that afternoon had been less than impenetrable, the red-headed girl at the florist's would certainly have broken through it and led away his goat. Her manners were outrageous. She spoke to him in vicious little monosyllables, like a professional carpet-layer driving tacks, one with each rap of the hammer. And her impatient contempt of him for wanting a minute or two to make up his mind in as to what sort of flowers to get was too great for her to bear alone. She passed it on with a despairing lift of the eyebrows, to the next customer, a man a good fifteen years younger and fifty pounds lighter than Henry, who looked as if he were trying to look as much as possible like John Barrymore.

As I have said, Henry was in high good humor and wasn't thinking much about the girl one way or the other. But if an omniscient stranger had dropped in and taken him by the elbow and pointed an uncanny finger at the young lady and said, "See that red-headed girl? Do you know who she is? She's your fairy godmother," Henry would have been incredulous.

He had plenty of reasons for feeling good. In the first place, it was a great piece of luck his having remembered to come to the florist's. Irene, on the eve of her departure for a four days' visit with a married sister, had adjured him to send flowers to Muriel Durant for her coming-out party. She had added:

"Or course you'll forget it. I suppose I ought to attend to it myself, but I simply haven't a minute. Do you suppose you *could* remember a thing like that for once? Anyhow, I can call up and apologize afterward. They all know you—that's one comfort!"

To which Henry had replied: "You don't mean to say that little Muriel Durant is coming out into society? She can't be more than fourteen, can she?"

And Irene had said: "Oh, don't be an idiot! She finished at Eastover last June, and she was twenty last September." (By this time you will, I suppose, have made the correct assumption that Irene was Henry's wife.)

Henry had pondered her information during a reflective moment, and then had exclaimed: "Good Lord! We're getting old, Irene."

She had concisely replied, "You were old when you were born," which concluded the conversation.

So, you see, it was distinctly one on Irene that, having put the stiff-cornered invitation into his pocket

and jabbed his finger on it just as he was leaving his office, he had remembered, after all, to order the flowers for Muriel.

He got out the invitation, made blue pencil marks around Muriel's name and address, and the date of the party, and handed it over to the girl, so that there couldn't be any mistake about it. For once Irene would have to admit he'd done something right!

This was only a small contributing factor in his conviction that, for to-day at least, all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Instead of making a mad dash now for the five-forty-six, missing it perhaps, and having to wait for the six-three, which would make him late for dinner, he was going to stroll contentedly around the corner to the University Club, light a pipe and read the *English Review,* then have a cocktail and dine all by himself. After that, and at the conclusion of a silent and solitary cigar (because no one, not even your friends, ever spoke to you in the University Club), he would stroll around the corner again to the Illinois Theater, where he had a single seat in the middle of the third row, for Francia Forrester (her opening night, too) in a new play called *The Mark.*

Henry had been downright clever about Miss Forrester. Of all the actresses he had ever seen she was

indisputably his first favorite. Whenever she came to Chicago he took Irene to see her play. And by pretending to be rather bored with her he had prevented Irene from making caustic remarks about her. All Irene ever needed as a target for her justly-celebrated wit was an outspoken admiration of Henry's.

But to-night, sitting alone in the third row, he'd be absolved from the necessity of making derogatory remarks which, to himself, seemed almost blasphemous. He could be as enthusiastic as he felt—laugh when he pleased, cry if he liked, and indulge, without interruption, the day-dream that he really knew her. He could appropriate that wonderful complex smile of hers all to himself, hear her voice with all the thousand shades there were in it, speaking friendly words to him.

After the play he would fortify the day-dream with a half-liter of beer, catch the last train home, and not have to speak a word until he said "good morning" to the children and their governess at breakfast.

You may have perceived that all these delights before him sprang from a single fountain-head, namely, the fact that Irene was still away on a visit.

The one thing that friends of the Huttons always said about them was that, of course, they were really devoted to each other. And, after all, this may be said to have been true. It was only Irene's deep under-

lying fondness for her husband that made his social refractoriness so exasperating to her.

There are some metals, you know, that it's very difficult to do anything with. They won't melt nor bend nor draw. The way to deal with a specimen of this sort is to get it as hot as possible and then hammer it, rapidly and incessantly, from all sides, with a lot of little hammers. If you keep at this long enough you will get it into a state where it will draw out as fine as you please.

I don't know whether Irene had ever heard of this method or not. If she hadn't, she invented it and applied it to Henry, and her deeply underlying affection for him had kept her at it pretty constantly during the ten years since they were married.

Conversely, of course, it was Henry's deep underlying affection for her that kept him milling away so constantly at the office trying to add each year, another couple of thousand or so, to his income and meet the increasing spread of Irene's ideas. And perhaps it was because he was really proud of her—admired her wit, liked her clean, bright good looks, and gloried, vicariously, in her social success, that he writhed under her easily-roused exasperation. Also, perhaps, that was why he was a little more self-conscious and left-handed, and, in her favorite word, "impossible," under her eye than when she wasn't around.

He was mighty glad he hadn't forgotten to go to the florist's.

He paid for the flowers he had selected and turned to leave the shop.

"Any card?" asked the red-headed girl, with a rasp.

"Card!" repeated Henry a little blankly, his mind suddenly recalled from a long way off.

"To tell who they're from."

She said it a syllable at the time, almost in the tone Irene might have used. Only, of course, the red-headed girl wasn't his wife. Really, she ought to have been discharged on the spot.

The sweat beaded out on Henry's brow. He had almost made a mistake after all!

He fished one of his cards out of his pocket-book. Then, feeling that it looked rather blank to go to little Muriel, he wrote on it in pencil, "I'll see you Wednesday night, if I possibly can," and signed it "H. H."

By that time the red-headed girl was fully absorbed in meeting the needs of the young man who looked like John Barrymore. He wanted, it appeared, all the Aaron Ward roses there were in the store. But she reached out an unconscious hand for Henry's card, and he went away.

He had narrowly escaped a distressing blunder. But it was all right now!

Henry and Irene had really quite a pleasant evening

together on the day of her return. Absence seemed always to make her heart grow fonder, and it had often occurred to Henry that if she ever got the chance she would be devoted to his memory. No man would ever have a more loyal widow than he—there was that to be said, anyway.

As a rule, after little absences like this, the first thing to reestablish her customary wifely attitude was his calling her by name. He persisted in pronouncing it to rhyme with queen, in spite of the fact that for six long years, ever since she herself had discovered that among the better class of the English people, it was invariably pronounced to rhyme with sheeny, she had been vainly trying to reform him. Actually, she had overlooked two such slips to-night. Also, seeming content with his own account of his activities during her absence, she had forborne to cross-examine him in a search for possible social derelictions.

If she could just have stuck to that attitude until she had seen him off for the eight-seventeen train, next morning! But over the breakfast table, as he reached for his second cup of coffee (he was always reaching around like that, especially at breakfast—never would wait to have the maid come in and pass things properly), she said: "I suppose of course you forgot to send flowers to Muriel."

He felt so pleased and virtuous and triumphant over

the answer he could make to this observation that he went on and finished the paragraph he was reading from his propped-up newspaper before he spoke. He must seem perfectly casual about it.

"What's that?" he said, as if her words had just penetrated to his brain. "Oh, no. I attended to that." And, his eyes still on the paper, he made a long arm for another lump of sugar to put in his coffe—as if he weren't fat enough already!

"Henry! Please!" This fetched him up from the paper. "Are you quite sure you sent them to the right place? And gave them the right day? Of course it isn't important to you, but it is to me, rather."

Now triumph spoke out, undisguised. "I went to the florist's Monday. I bought the flowers. I had the invitation with me and I turned it over to the girl, with Muriel's name and the address marked. And I told them to send the flowers Tuesday, that's yesterday, as you said."

If only he could be as overpoweringly right as that a little oftener!

"Congratulations," said Irene, "and apologies."

He never resented satire, and the hard dry little smile she sent across at him now always pleased him rather. So he pushed the paper on to the floor as a renunciatory symbol and returned her smile.

"I had a narrow escape, though," he confessed. "I had paid for the flowers and was actually on the point of walking out of the shop when the girl asked me if I didn't want to send a card to show whom they came from. That had completely slipped my mind. Luckily I had one with me."

"One of *my* cards?" asked Irene.

Henry looked at her aghast. "Why—why, no," he said. "I—I, you see, I hadn't any of yours in my pocket."

"One of your business cards, I suppose," she added silkily; Hutton & Ingraham, Architects and Municipal Engineers."

It had been one of his personal cards, all right. He remembered the look of it plainly.

But he didn't say so. Before he could pump the words up, the silence had got so heavy, he simply couldn't lift the lid.

It wasn't a dead silence, either. It was a silence with a tension of about fifteen thousand volts—the deadliest, probably, of all Irene's weapons. When she gave him a verbal dressing down he got a certain appreciative pleasure out of her skill, grinned unhappily sometimes over the aptness of her phrases. But when she said nothing as actively as she was saying it now—just looked at him, hopelessly, tragically, like that—she made him feel like a man sliding down a slate

roof; the smoothness of her silence gave him nothing to hold on by.

He made a ghastly pretense of going on with his breakfast—reached for another egg, caught his sleeve in his coffee cup, and, when he saw that an inundation was inevitable, uttered an explosive damn with the muffler cut out. The children both blushed, and Irene left the table. Presently he heard her at the telephone calling up Muriel's mother.

If you could have bought Henry just then, at his own valuation, you would have got a bargain. He was always like that when Irene had just finished him off. In an hour or so he would get mad enough to tell himself that all these trifling blunders of his that Irene made such a fuss about amounted to nothing—weren't worth three epitaphs in a cemetery. He was an ass to mind. But until anger, which was always with him confounded slow, came to the rescue he was a miserable object. Just a big fat mistake, he used to tell himself; a moron. Under the Binet test they'd probably find he was just six years old!

If the omniscient stranger—the one, you will remember, who didn't come into the florist's and point out the red-headed girl as Henry's fairy godmother—had appeared just now at Henry's elbow, he'd have said comfortingly: "Sit tight, old chap. This thing is coming out just exactly right. Clock-work is nothing to it.

Here's where you are going to put it all over Irene. Do you see who that is in the cap and apron, coming in the door? That's the messenger of Fate."

And Henry would have said: "That's nothing but the maid bringing in the mail. And she always brings it while we're at breakfast."

Yes, but in the normal course of things she handed it to Irene, who sat at the head of the table. She hesitated now whether to lay it down beside the vacant place (she was thoroughly imbued with Irene's ideas) or to carry it around to Henry. She did the latter.

On the top of the heap was a feminine looking note with the gilded crest of a hotel embossed on the corner of it, addressed in a tall, angular, feminine hand, to, amazingly, "Henry Hutton, Esq."

Henry didn't do domestic architecture; he had no women clients. Neither had he any women friends, and he didn't get a note from a woman once a year. If this one had been addressed Mr. Henry Hutton, he'd have read it Mrs., and tossed it across the table. But you couldn't get away from that "Esq." The thing was meant for him.

He ripped it open and, with no feeling in the world but clear bewilderment, read this:

"Dear Mr. Hutton:

"It was sweet of you to remember how I love Aaron Wards. You've sent me such a world of them that the

place I loathe more than anywhere else in the world—my sitting-room in a hotel—is perfectly delicious with them.

"Do come and see how lovely they are. Only, Wednesday night, after two performances, I am no good to anybody. So if you can not come then it will be just as well. Why not for tea some afternoon when there isn't any matinée? Only, let me know when.

"Till then, Yours very gratefully,
"Francia Forrester."

It was a purely reflex act, like dropping a hot plate, or getting up again when you've sat down on a pin, which caused him to cram this portentous letter and its incriminating envelope into his pocket when he heard Irene coming back into the room. The great idea hadn't begun to form in his mind at all. The germ was there, perhaps, but it hadn't begun to incubate.

Irene was trying to tell him something, and of course he heard what she said, because he remembered it afterward. Muriel's flowers hadn't come at all. What idiotic thing did he suppose he had done? What address had he ordered them sent to?

As I say, he paid no attention to this, and instinctively fell back upon an old maneuver—almost the only one in his domestic repertory, poor chap—snatched out his watch, muttered in horror that he'd have to run, dashed out into the hall, struggled into his over-

coat and was off with a triumphant slam of the front door. It was crude, of course, but effective.

In the train, behind his open newspaper, he figured the thing out. It was pure Sanskrit at first, because the only ready-made idea that came to him—that the thing might be a hoax—was, of course, childish. His sentimental weakness for the lady in question was something he had confided to nobody. Well, then, it must be accounted for somehow.

In the first place, who the devil was Aaron Ward? He had heard of him somewhere recently. Aaron Ward—Aaron Ward roses. Good Lord! That young chap with the eyebrow mustache in the florist's! The red-headed girl, God bless her (this was perhaps where the great idea began to hatch, only he didn't look it in the face till a good while afterward), the red-headed girl must have shuffled the cards—put his, with the penciled note that he'd see her Wednesday night if he possibly could, in with the roses and sent them off to Francia.

And the corollary was, of course, that she had put the Aaron Ward young man's card in the box with Muriel's daffodils. But Muriel hadn't got the daffodils! Wait a minute, though! He didn't know that. She hadn't got any daffodils from *him*. Of course.

That was all there was to it. The mistake could easily be set right by learning from Muriel the name

on the card that had come with her daffodils, informing the florist of the red-headed girl's blunder, which would probably result in a well-merited loss of her job, and writing a polite note . . .

There his thought stumbled over an obstacle. No; let me put it differently; there was where the great idea fairly came out of the egg and made a little cheeping noise that attracted his attention.

Why had Miss Forrester written a friendly—certainly a well acquainted—letter like that to a total stranger—a man she had never heard of, instead of calling up the florist's and telling them they had made a mistake?

Off and on, mostly on, he puzzled about this all day. It wasn't an irritating puzzle though—unaccountably, rather a pleasant one. He didn't find a demonstrable answer to it, but by using a little imagination he worked out something like this:

She probably met a lot of people everywhere she played—more, perhaps, than she found it easy to remember. They'd all remember her—Think of forgetting Francia Forrester!—and it was a safe guess that she was well accustomed to having her acquaintance confidently claimed by people she had forgotten all about. That was plain enough. Well, then, she gets about a million roses from some one who knows that they're her favorite flower—some one evidently more

than a merely technical acquaintance, only she can't remember him from Adam. Her contrition about this makes her write him an extra nice note.

"Good heavens!" said Henry. "I believe she thinks she knows me!"

At that, the great idea flapped its wings. Henry looked at it and blushed guiltily; but all the same he grinned.

"Gosh!" he said in an awed whisper.

He surprised Irene that night by getting dressed with the utmost docility to go to Muriel's party. Penitence, she supposed, over his stupidity about the flowers.

It wasn't that though. There was a question he wanted to ask, confidentially, of Muriel—just to make sure that he had the situation doped out right. In furtherance of this idea, he looked rather vague when Irene asked him what kind of flowers he had sent the girl and affected uncertainty.

"Roses, I think," he said; "Aaron Ward roses. Is that the name of a kind of flower?"

She said of course it was, but that it was absurd he couldn't remember. "Was it Aaron Ward roses or not?"

But he stuck to it that he couldn't be sure.

He had rather a disastrous time at Muriel's party,

owing to the fixed idea he had gone there with. It's hard enough, goodness knows, for a slim, good-looking youngster of twenty to get a débutante, at her coming-out party, off into a corner where he can ask her confidential questions. For a married man of twice his age and almost twice his weight, it is a task at once herculean and scandalous.

But with a magnificent disregard of conventional difficulties when he had a desirable object in view (it was a quality which had put him close to the head of his profession and would, some day, Irene was in the habit of saying, put her either in a madhouse or in her grave), he kept at it until he succeeded. It was up on the landing of the stairs that Muriel stood still long enough to listen to the question he had to ask.

She was a little embarrassed. She'd always liked Mr. Hutton, and she hoped he hadn't been drinking.

"Did you get some flowers," he asked significantly, "from somebody you don't know—some daffodils—quite a lot of daffodils?"

Muriel blushed and wanted to know how he knew.

Henry had an inspiration. "A strange man's card, with something rather nice, you know, written on it?"

The flush brightened.

"I didn't see the card," Henry added hastily, "and I don't know the man who sent it, but I know what he

looks like—awfully good-looking young chap. Looks quite a lot, I remember it struck me, like John Barrymore."

Muriel cried out ecstatically, "Oh!" then remembered she was a young lady and recovered her dignity.

"Of course it was a mistake," she said.

"What are you going to do about it?" Henry asked.

And she said that the only thing to do, of course, was to send the flowers back to the florist's, with the card.

"I don't know," said Henry. "You might pretend you knew him; write him a nice little note of thanks, and ask him to call."

Muriel forgot she was out, and then remembered again.

"That would be a perfectly impossible thing to do," she said very coolly, "and anyhow he wouldn't come."

"Oh, I don't know," said Henry. "I'm going to."

And with those words, whose cryptic meaning Muriel, of course, couldn't guess at, the great idea transubstantiated itself into an adamantine resolve. He would accept Francia Forrester's invitation, take the credit for the roses and attempt to palm himself off on her as an old friend. It would be terrifying—would probably turn out to be disastrous, but he'd have a shot at it. If he were, as Irene was so fond of saying, impossible, why not have a run for his money

and do an impossible thing? He never got any fun out of the delinquencies Irene was always taxing him with. He might, Heaven knew, not get any fun out of this one. But it wouldn't be for want of trying.

In the light of this resolution he rather enjoyed Irene's confidential summary of his various misdemeanors at the party. If she had been in one of her rarely tolerant and affectionate moods she'd have made it a good deal harder for him to embark on the career of crime he projected for the next day.

At half past four the next afternoon, having ascertained the number of Miss Forrester's apartment from the information desk at her hotel, he gave his card to a bellboy with instructions to give it to Miss Forrester if she were in, but to bring it back to him if she were not. He had disobeyed her injunction to let her know in advance when he was coming, and for the same reason he used a bellboy and a card rather than the house telephone to announce himself.

He had figured it out, that writing her a note—still more, telephoning her—would only accent the misgiving she must have that she really didn't know him. He couldn't better the *status quo,* you see, but he took pains not to worsen it. And if the boy brought back the card he'd try again.

But nothing so untoward as that happened. The omniscient stranger, it appeared, was still on the job.

The boy brought back word that Miss Forrester was in and would see him. Would he please come up?

Now, if Nemesis would just refrain from dropping the elevator he was riding up in, or shaking down the building with an earthquake before he had time to knock at her door . . . No, it was all right. Nemesis was asleep at the switch.

The maid let him in, and at the same moment Miss Forrester emerged radiantly from her bedroom door and came across the room holding out her hand to him. And there was never a flutter of an eyelid to betray the fact that the sight of him was as totally unfamiliar as his name must have been. She was some actress, all right! He almost asked himself the idiotic question: "Does she, perhaps, know me after all?"

"It was lovely of you to come," she said.

She left his name out of the sentence, because, as a matter of fact, she couldn't be dead sure she wouldn't be expected to call him Henry.

"Aren't they wonderful?" She waved a free hand toward the roses.

They were. They staggered Henry. The number of those tiny blooms it must have taken to turn the room into a bower like this was appalling.

"I like them, too, you know," he said. "But if they have given you back one-tenth of the pleasure you gave

me Monday night, that's about the best I can hope for."

It's quite true that if any one could have shown Irene a dictograph of the ensuing conversation she'd have denied on oath that a man who talked like that could be her Henry. And, of course, in a sense he wasn't. He had that deadliest of all defects in husbands, that it required excitement — something he could recognize as an emergency—to get his mind in focus. Down at his office, of course, they knew that when he was confronted with the necessity for producing the one brilliant idea that would triumphantly solve an otherwise insoluble problem, he almost always came across with it. But the perfectly ordered domestic and social routine that Irene had arranged for him presented none of these crises—none at least that he recognized as such, and the consequence was that when she heard him spoken of as brilliant it made her gnash her teeth. Why couldn't he trot out a little of that brilliancy—if he had it—for home consumption?

Of course the excitement of this piratical raid on Miss Forrester had keyed him up to concert pitch.

He took the chair and the cigarette she offered him, and cut loose, playing for all it was worth the hunch that as long as he kept upon the topic of her profes-

sional successes, which he knew like a book, the ice would bear. His notion was that if he could get through half an hour without betraying himself, she'd take him for granted.

And it looked, at first, as if he were going to succeed. He could remember six or eight years back the minor parts she'd played before she became a star—compare the opportunities that this play and that had offered her. And certainly she seemed interested. When the tea she had professed herself as perishing for came in, she forgot, for a good ten minutes, to pour it out.

But the little relaxation in her manner he was looking for, such as would have accompanied her saying to herself, "Oh, of course, I must know him! Why bother?" didn't come. She was beginning to look a little worried. And once or twice, he'd have said, her attention wandered. But this, of course, made him talk all the better.

It was distinctly with the air of rousing herself that she said presently: "Tell me something honestly. Do you like this new piece of mine?"

"It's as good as you need," he told her. "Of course it isn't on the level—awful bunk, really. But I didn't discover that fact for twenty-four hours after I left the theater, and of course when I did that only made you the more wonderful."

She nodded sadly over what he had said about her play.

"Oh, I know," she said. "That's all very well. But if I could only get a real play for once . . ." She sighed; then, "I wish you would write me one," she concluded.

Now, on the basis of Francia Forrester's experience, she couldn't have made a safer remark than that. A colleague of hers told me once that whenever she meets a person she obviously ought to remember but doesn't, she always says, "How's the new play coming along?" and that it always works.

Francia, you will observe, played it even safer than that. But it didn't work with Henry. He stared at her, then lay back in his chair and laughed.

"I couldn't write a play," he said, "to save myself from being shot at sunrise. And if I did, I'd deserve to be. Good Heavens!"

Francia got up from her chair, took a turn across the room, came back and indulged in a long look straight into his face.

"I give it up," she said. "Either I have lost my mind or else I have never, before this afternoon, set eyes on you in my life."

You couldn't blame Henry for gasping at that. The suddenness of it simply scattered his wits in five directions. Before he could get them back she silenced the

words he would have stammered out—something to the effect that it wasn't wonderful she had forgotten him; he didn't blame her a bit—and went on.

"I know I can forget all sorts of people. My memory for faces is dreadful, and even for voices it isn't very good. I have forgotten people, sometimes, whom I ought to have known well, people who—admired me a lot, people who have wanted to—make love to me, childhood friends—if you will take their word for it—all sorts of people. But I know, I absolutely know, I couldn't have forgotten a man who admired my acting the way you do and didn't think he could write me a play."

Henry turned this over in his mind for about ten seconds, then let go a long sigh, and slowly and reluctantly heaved himself out of his chair.

"I can't let you doubt your own mind," he said, "and since you take it like that, I suppose the only thing left for me to do is to confess you're perfectly right about it. You never did see me before this afternoon."

He moved mournfully across the room toward the chair where his hat and overcoat were. But as he did so, Francia Forrester sat down, rested her elbow on the arm of her chair, her chin in her hand, and out of a frowning perplexity, told him to wait a minute.

"I don't understand it at all, yet. If you—admired my acting like that and wanted to get acquainted with

me enough to send me all these roses, why did you make it so hard for me to find you out? There was no address on your card. I had to look you up in the telephone directory—take all sorts of trouble."

"I didn't send you the roses, either," said Henry, sounding the full depth of the abyss. "I tried to send some daffodils to little Muriel Durant for her coming-out party. And what I wrote on the card about Wednesday night was meant for her. So when I got your note I was about as surprised as you are now. But when I figured out what had happened—that the florist's girl had made a mistake and shuffled the cards, and that you must think I was somebody you knew, why—well, I just fell into temptation and did it. It was an outrageous thing to do, of course"—Francia confirmed this with a nod—"stealing another man's credit and trying to burglarize my way into your acquaintance. And of course I owe you all the apologies in the world—as many as—as there are roses."

"Yes," said Francia, "that's precisely the number. And, of course, you're sorry now you did it. You haven't said that yet."

"No," said Henry, "I don't believe I can run to that."

"It gets more puzzling all the time," said Francia. "You don't look a bit like a man who would do such a thing."

"I am though," said Henry, making a clean breast of it, "exactly."

And at that she laughed outright. "Oh, don't stand there like a ridiculous schoolboy," she said. "Sit down and drink your tea and tell me why in the world you did it."

"Why, it was just sort of irresistible," he told her soberly. "I have always admired you a lot and thought how perfectly great it must be to know you. And when your note came out of a clear sky . . . Well, you see, I don't have much real fun except at my work. The things I have to do for fun bore me to death. My wife and I do dinners and dances and auction and golf and a certain amount of culture on the side, and there isn't any of it I'm not glad to escape by staying down and working late at the office."

"Why do you hate it like that?" she wanted to know.

"Oh, I suppose," he said, "it's because I'm such a blithering fool at it."

She shot the next question in rather quickly.

"Who tells you you're a fool? How do you know?"

Henry blushed a little deeper and stammered. "I—why, I guess it's self-evident. You ought to see me trying to play bridge."

"If you could make twenty-five thousand dollars a

year playing bridge and get a big professional reputation at it, you could learn, couldn't you?"

But without waiting for an answer, she asked another question.

"I know what an architect is," she said. "What's a municipal engineer?"

He looked at her in horror. "Was that the card I sent up this afternoon—Hutton & Ingraham? Oh, Lord! Well, now you can see for yourself. That's the sort of thing I do."

But she really wanted to know what a municipal engineer was, and as well as his confusion would permit he told her.

"City planning—that sort of thing. When a town wants to rearrange its railway terminals and cut through new streets, wants a plan for placing their public buildings and parks, they're beginning to come to us."

"I should think that would be fun enough for anybody," she said.

"Yes, and I should think acting would be fun," he retorted. "But if your whole professional reputation hangs on everything you do . . ."

She caught the point instantly and on her quick appreciative nod he dropped the sentence. Once more, with a regretful sigh, he got to his feet.

"Well, I guess that's about all," he said. "I guess you understand now why I did it. It was such a wonderful adventure, with just a chance — one in ten maybe—that I could really get away with it that I couldn't resist. I knew it was utterly outrageous, and I was horribly scared, but I thought the chance was worth it. And now I'll apologize and say good-by."

"You've already apologized," observed Francia, "but unless I have failed to come up to expectations, why say good-by? You certainly deserve a good time, poor dear, and if you think I'll do, I'll try to show it to you."

If ever in the world a promise of that sort was fulfilled, this one, in good measure, pressed down and running over, was fulfilled by Francia. Indeed, the phrase, "a good time," becomes ludicrously inadequate as a description of what Henry had for the next three or four days.

She began a little cautiously. Heaven knew she had reason to be cautious. She knew men down to the ground. A man might seem as innocuous as sawdust (but sawdust is one of the chief ingredients of dynamite) and still be capable, if handled carelessly, of exploding—making a horrible mess of himself and of all the surrounding scenery.

But toward Henry the caution, even at first, was largely a matter of habit. One really couldn't be mis-

taken about him; he was simply good all the way through, and nothing revealed this fact more transparently than the boyish sense of delightful guilt which he carried to the adventure.

Being permitted to come back through the stage door after the play and wait outside her dressing-room until she was ready, and then take her to supper somewhere and sit up till one o'clock, when they closed the restaurant, thrilled him just as much as scuttling his first ship may have thrilled Sir Henry Morgan. She wouldn't for the world have let him suspect that supper at midnight was a regular meal for her, rather than a convivial extravagance, and that to eat it in company with one of her friends was no more romantic than one of his own dinner parties. She would as soon have thought of telling a two-year-old child, who dropped on hands and knees and said Boo! to her, that he couldn't possibly be mistaken for a lion and that it was foolish of him to try to frighten her.

Really it struck Francia as downright pathetic (was there a play in it, she wondered? It would bear thinking out), the notion of a really big man like Henry, with a first-class mind and a real imagination, beaming with inexpressible gratitude, like a meager, big-eyed child who has just been handed a red tarlatan stocking containing a handful of popcorn and an apple,

and three hard candies, from a Settlement Christmas tree—a man like Henry beaming like that over a little tolerant, friendly affection—over not being called a fool!

She had asked him, you will remember, who it was who told him he was a fool, and Henry hadn't answered. But she wasn't long in finding out. His loyalty to Irene was impenetrable, but, like the rest of him, it was as transparent as glass.

Really, you know, it might make a play. All it needed was some means or other of bringing that silly superior wife to her senses. Because, of course, it would have to end that way. Francia's counterpart could not, any more than Francia herself, take permanently the job of providing sunshine for Henry to bloom under—not, that is, unless the play was to be downright immoral like some of those Continental things. No, that wouldn't do at all. The plot had got to provide some device for bringing Irene to reason.

She'd have liked to talk the notion over with Henry himself, but forbore. He hadn't asked any sympathy about Irene. That was one of the nice things about him. But there must be some way. . . .

If she could have consulted the omniscient stranger, he'd have reassured her.

"It's all right," he'd have said. "Just wait till Henry

takes you to lunch at the University Club Monday." Henry had asked her to lunch on Monday, but wasn't sure it would be at the University Club. He'd know before noon on that day.

In the circumstances, nobody in the world but Henry would have taken her to lunch at the University Club on Monday. The circumstances were, or rather, the circumstance was, that one of Irene's Boards (she was attached to as many boards as the side of a house) always met there that day. This one happened to be the Women's Auxiliary to the Executive Committee of one of the settlements. But the fact is unimportant, because the personnel of all of them was substantially the same. On Wednesday mornings, they were directors of the Music Extension League, and on Thursday afternoons, a Circle that sat around and heard papers read on plays.

Well, then, you will understand that although their interest in the drama was technically in abeyance till next Thursday afternoon, it was natural that, when one of the women across the table from Irene leaned forward suddenly and said:

"Look over there, three tables up and by the window —the woman with that tailless ermine thing and the Georgette hat! Do you know who she is? She's Francia Forrester."

It is natural, I repeat, that on hearing these words,

they should all have looked in the direction indicated. Irene was a little slower about it than the others, because she had to turn around, and as she did so everybody else at the table gasped. Because just then the man Francia Forrester was lunching with turned to say something to the waiter.

And it was Henry!

An awkward situation? I hope you have understood Irene better than that. Of course you know she wouldn't make a scene of the regular third-act variety—march over between the tables and denounce Miss Forrester for the edification of all the denizens of the dining-room, as a seducer, a home-wrecker, and an abandoned person! Such a thing would be inconceivable. But, if you picture her now as even a little pale, making a ghastly attempt to ignore the *contre-temps* altogether, trying bravely to concentrate her attention upon the necessary procedure of the Women's Auxiliary to the Executive Committee of the settlement, but becoming, in spite of herself, *distraite,* finally pleading a headache and retiring in well-suppressed tears; if your imagination has framed up any such picture as that, it will be because I have unskilfully painted Irene in false colors. This is what she did:

She indulged in a brief but comprehensive look at Henry and his exquisitely gowned companion, then

turned back to the expectant table, with precisely the same resigned, hopeless smile she usually wore when he was the topic of conversation.

"Isn't that exactly like Henry?" she said. "I knew he was lunching with her, but he never said a word about bringing her here. And I supposed, of course, it was to be at her hotel. If only I had known, we could have arranged it. . . . Shall I bring her over anyway? Would you like to meet her? She's really rather interesting."

And I am sure I need not tell you that no one at that table spoke up and said: "Yes, but then why didn't you say, without turning round to look, 'If Francia Forrester is here, Henry must be lunching with her, because I know he was going to.'"

None of them said anything like that, nor even looked as if she thought it. They all chorused excited and sincere approval of Irene's suggestion. A near view of that hat alone would be worth the price of admission.

"All right," said Irene. "Let's get our business done first. One of you keep an eye on her so that she doesn't get away."

But it wasn't more than five minutes before the young woman across the table broke into the random doings about the settlement, with the admission:

"I haven't an idea what we're talking about. Do, Irene, there's a dear, run over and cinch her now. Because, if she starts away, it will be too late."

With an assenting nod Irene pushed back from the table and started across the room.

She hadn't an idea what she'd do when she got there. But it went deeper than that. She could have cried out like the little old woman who had her petticoat cut off around her knees, "This surely can't be I!"

She had always supposed she knew what she was —a superior, unemotional, hard-finished, up-to-the-minute wife of a man she deserved a certain amount of credit for tolerating. (She loved him, of course, only she wanted a hero medal for doing it.)

But over there at that table she was approaching sat a radiant lady—just about the most wonderful-looking creature she had ever seen in her life—who wasn't tolerating Henry at all. Who was, to all appearances, glowingly enjoying him and not asking any credit from anybody.

She made a frantic effort to feel amused, but the attempt collapsed. She wasn't amused. She was terrified. The terror rose to the point of panic just before she reached the point where they'd be sure to see that she was coming, and she actually stood still. But for the Auxiliary she knew was watching her progress from across the room, she'd have turned and fled.

It was this hesitation that caught Francia's eye.

"Don't jump," she said quietly to Henry, "but isn't this Irene?"

And on the instant that he looked around and she saw his face, Francia rose and, with a bright smile of welcoming recognition, held out her hand and met Irene half-way.

Irene could have fallen on her neck and blessed her for that. From across the room, the effect of that greeting would be exactly right.

"Mrs. Hutton?" said Francia. "I have been hoping for this chance."

She had deflected her line of approach to Irene a little—just enough to cover Henry, not feeling at all sure how he'd look and what he'd say.

He didn't say much, which was, perhaps, the best thing he could have done, only, "Hello, Irene!" But he brought it out cheerfully enough, and he got up and fetched a chair for her.

"Oh, I can't stop," Irene said. "I just came over to see if you wouldn't come and meet some friends of mine over there."

"Of course," said Francia cheerfully. "Only do sit down here for a minute first. Henry admits he's got an engagement for a quarter to two, so of course he's got to run."

It was quite evident by the way his eyes widened

and his breath drew in in protest, that this was news to Henry. But Francia smiled at him good humoredly, and laid a restraining hand on his sleeve.

"Well, then," she amended, "you haven't any engagement, but I want you to run along so that I can have a little visit with—I simply can't call people by their last names—with Irene." (Francia pronounced it English fashion.) "But," here Francia turned to her, "I wonder if you'll loan him to me once more. For dinner to-night? He's the best play critic I know —the only one who's ever told me straight out that *The Mark* was 'bunk,' which it is, and I've got a new one which I want to see if he likes better."

Irene managed something that sounded all right, and Francia turned back to Henry. "Quarter to six, then?" she asked. "Splendid! Now do run along and let us two get acquainted."

Henry set off dutifully, but stopped, apparently having thought of something else he wanted to say, turned short and collided rather disastrously with a waiter. It was just the sort of thing that Henry would do, you know, and he immediately proceeded to make matters worse by seizing a napkin and attempting (he was prevented, of course, by a decorous attendant) to assist in clearing up the damage.

Irene gave a little groan of despair, but it died on her lips as she looked at Francia. Because Francia

Henry stopped short and collided with the waiter.

was looking at Henry with an amused, reassuring—oh, a downright affectionate little smile. And the smile persisted as, with her eyes, she followed him out of the dining-room. Then she turned a rather straight look on Irene.

"Don't you love him for that?" she asked. And without waiting for a reply she went on. "Oh, not only for that; for not backing me up when I said he had an engagement. You see, I know all sorts of men pretty well—I know lots of women well, too, only not many sorts. But I have known some of the littlest men and some of the biggest men, and men all the way in between. I suppose the fact is that they don't begin getting 'finished' until they've stopped growing up. The ones that stop growing—inside, I mean—when they're still small, don't have any trouble learning tricks—our tricks. They play our game as well as we do. Better, sometimes.

"But if a man never stops growing up, just goes on getting bigger and bigger all the time, why, he never gets over being a boy—clumsy, you know, and—sensitive.

"It's the other type, of course, that's supposed to be attractive to women," she went on thoughtfully, "and of course they're easier to flirt with and lots safer. But it's men like Henry we really go crazy about."

"I can't say," observed Irene, "that I've noticed any women going crazy about Henry."

"No," said Francia, "I suppose not. And very likely they haven't." (Please observe that these were two entirely distinct statements. Irene did, and the distinction was not wasted.) "But if that's so," Francia went on, "the simple reason is that Henry really doesn't care a cotton hat about any of us—except you, of course. But if he ever did. . . ."

If Francia had rehearsed the waiter who came up just then with the coffee, she couldn't have timed his entrance more nicely.

"Oh, I'm going to have my coffee at the other table with Mrs. Hutton," she said.

When Irene got home, a little before six that night, she called up her mother, who lived only a house or two away, and asked her to come over for dinner. Nothing was the matter, she said rather impatiently. What should be! Only Henry was dining in town to-night, and she wanted company.

"You'd better take some aspirin," that lady remarked, after she'd had her first good look at her daughter. "Judging from the looks of your eyes and nose, you're catching one of your regular running colds."

"I suppose I am," said Irene. "It's that beastly

ladies dining-room at the University Club. There's always a draft there."

To this her mother replied, "Oh, then you did go to the University Club after all!"—a remark which Irene wanted explained.

"Why," said her mother, "Henry called up about twelve o'clock, and wanted to know if you were lunching there. I said I supposed so; it was Monday, and he said yes, he knew it. But he wanted to be sure. Didn't he find you?"

"Yes," said Irene, at the end of a blank thirty seconds, "he found me, all right."

Her mother went home again about half past eight, observing rather acidulously that she might as well, since Irene hadn't, it appeared, a word to throw at a dog. And Irene herself might better go to bed than just sit there blinking at the fire like that.

As things turned out it was just as well her mother did go home. Because it was only a few minutes later —hardly nine, in fact, when Henry let himself in.

There was no light in the drawing-room but the fire, so he kept very still. He jumped when Irene said from around the portière, and with a funny catch in her voice, too:

"Oh, Henry! What a fright you gave me!"

"Think I was a burglar?" asked Henry.

"Yes," said Irene. "My, but I'm glad you're not!"

And, to his utter astonishment, because he hadn't expected it to work so well as that—she came out into the hall and kissed him.

THE END

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